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Irony & Idealism

Rereading Schlegel, Hegel, & Kierkegaard



— FRED RUSH —

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*Rereading Schlegel, Hegel,
and Kierkegaard*

Fred Rush

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For my sons,
MATTHEW AND NICHOLAS

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Note on Text, References, and Translation

I have attempted to keep the number of references in check, and in order not to obstruct clear reading I do not cite works parenthetically in the text, but rather utilize footnotes. In the same spirit I have tried to keep the notes free of unnecessary argumentation and to restrict references to the secondary literature to those I think essential to making and defending the historical and conceptual points under direct discussion. The longer notes that remain are meant to provide added historical and cultural context. I do not mean in any way to slight good work in the area; however, part of the challenge in writing about this subject matter is to make it philosophically alive to those who are not antecedently predisposed to credit it. It is my conviction that a lean apparatus facilitates this.

I have consulted several of the often good English translations of main texts; however, I have altered translations or translated material myself when I thought necessary. I have included parallel citation to English translations for material outside the usual run of scholarly languages, e.g. Danish.

List of Abbreviations

- AA Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preußische (Berliner) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902)
- BBM Karl Leonard Reinhold, *Beyträge zur Berechtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen* (Jena: Mauke, 1790–4)
- CI Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989)
- CUP Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- E Karl Solger, *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst*, ed. W. Henkmann (Munich: Fink, 1970)
- E—O Søren Kierkegaard, *Either—Or*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987)
- FT Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- GA Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. R. Lauth, H. Jacobs, and H. Gliwitsky (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1964)
- HW G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1971)
- JPSW Friedrich Richter (Jean Paul), *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. E. Berend (Weimar and Berlin: Böhlau, 1927)
- KFSA Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. E. Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958)
- AFr *Athenäums-Fragmente*, in KFSA 2
- I *Ideen*, in KFSA 2
- LFr *Lyceums-Fragmente*, in KFSA 2
- PhL *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, in KFSA 18

- KrV Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. R. Schmidt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990) [citation to page numbers of the first (A) and second (B) original editions]
- KSNS Karl Solger, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, ed. L. Tieck and F. von Raumer (Leipzig, 1826)
- KSVÄ Karl Solger, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, ed. K. W. L. Heyse (Leipzig, 1829)
- NA Friedrich Schiller, *Schiller Nationalausgabe*, ed. J. Peterson, G. Fricke, H. Schneider, et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1943)
- NS Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), *Schriften*, ed. P. Kluckhorn and R. Samuel. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960)
FS *Fichte-Studien*, in NS 1
- PA Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, ed. W. Kaufmann, trans. A. Dru. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962)
- Papirer* Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, E. Torsting, et al. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909)
- PF Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985)
- R Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- SKJP Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, ed. and trans. A. Hannay (London and New York: Penguin, 1996)
- SKS Søren Kierkegaard, *Skrifter*, ed. Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret (Copenhagen: Gads, 1997)
- SLW Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)
- StA Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. F. Beißner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1943)
- SW Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971)
- ÜF Karl Leonard Reinhold, *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (Jena: Mauke, 1791)

μή, φίλα ψυχά, βίον ἀθάνατον
σπεύδε, τὰν δ' ἔμπρακτον ἄντλει μαχανάν

Pindar, *Pyth.* 3.61–2

La droite laisse couler du sable
Toutes les transformations sont possibles

Éluard, 'L'Invention'

Thine eyes are upon me, and I am not

Job 7:8 (King James)

Introductory Remarks

When I began writing the first portions of this book on academic leave in Cambridge in 1998, contemporary philosophical work in German romanticism in the English-speaking world was not exactly a stock in trade. The most well-known discussions of German romanticism had their home, rather, in philosophically informed literary theory.¹ The indispensable work of scholars such as M. H. Abrams,² Ernst Behler,³

¹ The extension of the term 'romanticism' is notoriously difficult to specify. See Arthur Lovejoy 'The Meaning of "Romantic" in Early German Romanticism', in: *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), pp. 183–206; and René Wellek, 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History', in: *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 128–98. It is typical to separate romanticism into national types; indeed, it is with literary romanticism that the idea of 'national literatures' comes into currency. The divisions between the national types, however, are permeable and there is a good deal of cross-pollination of romanticism between the main sorts—German, English, French, Italian, and Russian. German romanticism enjoys some historical precedence. The development of romanticism within German-speaking lands was crucially inspired by English and French prototypes (Edward Young, Milton, Rousseau, Pascal). In turn, German romanticism was imported back into England and France (e.g. the importance of Schelling to Coleridge's *Bibliographia Literaria* [1817], A.W. Schlegel's view of literature, as presented in De Staël's *De l'Allemagne* [1813].) Less agreed upon is the division of romanticism into historical periods. It seems common practice to distinguish between 'early' and 'late' romanticism—not across the board; the distinction always is made internal to the divisions into national types of romanticism—but there are, sometimes, options given for 'middle' romanticism as well. Within the study of German romanticism there is disagreement concerning where precisely to mark the break point between its early and late periods. A decent rule of thumb might be pre- versus post-Napoleonic periods. For my purposes it is not important to be precise; it is incontrovertible that, no matter where the dividing point is between 'early' and 'late' or 'early' and 'middle' German romanticism, Jena romanticism of this period is 'early'. Last, questions of the relevant period hinge on what kind of art is under consideration (e.g., romantic painting, romantic poetry, musical romanticism), making taxonomy even more daunting.

² *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).

³ *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); see also *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik*, ed. E. Behler and J. Hörisch (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987).

Karl Heinz Bohrer,⁴ René Wellek,⁵ and Theodore Ziolkowski⁶ is pivotal for those whose foremost interest is in literary theory deployed in an explicitly historical way; however, for many the principal exposure to thinkers like Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel is more contemporary, through poststructuralist views in philosophy and in the study of literature.⁷ French poststructuralism in many of its forms is dominated by extrapolations from Heidegger, and one could do worse than to see in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's treatment of Jena romanticism,⁸ for instance, an attempt to widen the ambit of Heideggerianism from its romantic home base in Hölderlin to include Novalis and Schlegel.⁹ On this account Schlegel especially becomes a prophet of deconstructive fragmentation and, while there is attention to the systematic philosophical concerns of the Jena group, the poststructuralist interpretation of early German romanticism is driven in large part by what seem to be

⁴ *Der romantische Brief. Die Entstehung ästhetischer Subjektivität* (München: Hanser, 1987); *Nach der Natur. Über Politik und Ästhetik* (München: Hanser, 1988); *Sprachen der Ironie—Sprachen des Ernstes*, ed. K.H. Bohrer (Frankfurt/M: Surkamp, 2000).

⁵ *The Romantic Age*, vol. 3 of *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History' and 'Romanticism Re-examined', in: *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. S. Nichols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 128–221.

⁶ *Das Wunderjahr in Jena. Geist und Gesellschaft 1794/95* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997); also *Vorboten der Moderne. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Frühromantik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006).

⁷ See Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Seuil, 1978). Even more influential is Paul de Man's embrace of what he takes to be the continuity of Rousseau and romanticism as a corrective to triumphal modernism. See *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), ch. 10; and 'The Concept of Irony', in: *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 163–82.

⁸ I shall use as equivalent the following expressions: 'early German romanticism', 'Jena romanticism', 'the Jena circle', and 'the romantic school'. The latter is the most well-known way to refer to Novalis, Schlegel and the group of thinkers assembled around them in the years 1794–1801. The first use of this term, in 1835, is Heine's, although he does not associate either August or Friedrich Schlegel with the 'school'. See 'Die romantische Schule', in: *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. J. Perfahl (München Winkler, 1972), 3: 275–8. Hermann Hettner adopts the term in 1850, including the Schlegel brothers. See *Die romantische Schule in ihrem inneren Zusammenhange mit Goethe und Schiller*, in: *Schriften zu Literatur* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1959). Rudolf Haym's important study, *Die Romantische Schule* (Berlin: Gaertner 1870), follows suit. Hettner first uses the phrase 'romantic irony' to refer to views of the Jena romantics, although Kierkegaard uses it earlier to refer to Karl Solger's account of irony.

⁹ A partial exception to the neglect of German romanticism in Anglophone philosophical circles was Hölderlin, who, although included in the extensive reconsideration in the 1980s that Fichte and Hegel enjoyed, was a mainstay in Dieter Henrich's influential Harvard lectures from the early 1970s, which were in wide distribution in mimeograph form until finally published, in edited form, see *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. D. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Henrich's lectures also treated Novalis and Schlegel (see ch. 15). Hölderlin is still a point of continual reference for Henrich, if not the point of reference. See especially *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992).

antecedent allegiances to programs promoting radical conceptual destabilization. There is accordingly less concern with the historical roots of the romantics' views, or with questions that philosophers typically ask with regard to the consistency, internal coherence, and conceptual impetus of a set of views under discussion. Less entrenched in ulterior commitments to 'theory' and much more historically and philosophically informed were the various treatments of romanticism and allied intellectual movements in Isaiah Berlin's work.¹⁰ But as is typical of Berlin, there is a premium placed on tracing the main currents and back-eddies of central ideas that course through the movement (against the broader background of what Berlin calls the 'Counter-Enlightenment') and, again, not much in the way of systematic assessment of the internal structure of views. Arthur Lovejoy's pioneering work in the 'history of ideas' is similar in its concern.¹¹ The one major recent philosophical treatment of which I did have knowledge at the time of beginning this project was Manfred Frank's, contained in two finely detailed and comprehensive books on the Jena philosophers (and other romantics).¹² Frank's work in this area still commands the most serious attention, having joined the classic treatments by Heine, Haym, Hegel, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Benjamin as a touchstone.¹³

In the period roughly from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, however, there was renewed philosophical interest in German romanticism in Anglophone history of philosophy. Frederick Beiser, Charles Larmore, Charles Taylor, and others brought out important studies of various aspects of Jena romanticism that

¹⁰ See *Vico & Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York: Vintage, 1976); *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* (New York: Fontana, 1994); *The Roots of Romanticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

¹¹ See 'On the Discriminations of Romanticisms', in: *Essays in the History of Ideas*, pp. 228–53.

¹² *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1989); "Unendliche Annäherung": *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1997).

¹³ Dilthey's engagement with philosophical romanticism is in many ways the most encompassing of what we are calling the classic treatments. Dilthey, a polymath whose interests seem to extend in almost every direction at once (e.g. the inaugural editor of what is still the main scholarly edition of Kant's works, a historian of philosophy who helped establish primary source materials in the history of German philosophy, author of significant critical studies of Nietzsche, Schleiermacher and Hölderlin, and a prime architect of hermeneutical theory), wrote on romanticism in order to conjoin it with his own *Lebensphilosophie*. Significantly, Dilthey deployed his interpretation of romanticism to reclaim a version of Kant over and against the various schools of late nineteenth-century neo-Kantianism. The present study follows Dilthey generally in stressing the idea that romanticism is an etiolated form of Kantianism, although Dilthey was much more concerned to draw a line of influence between specific Kantian doctrines and the Jena writers. Dilthey's principal interest falls on Goethe, Novalis, and Hölderlin. See *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, 14th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) [original=1905]. The best treatment of the relation of Goethe to German romanticism is David Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) (see especially § 9).

both amplified and challenged standing German and French treatments.¹⁴ The composition of *Irony and Idealism* developed in concert with taking the measure of this new literature on the subject. I have tried to be responsive to other recent interpretations of the philosophical import of German romanticism while also cutting through the academic underbrush to present as clearly and on its own as I am able what I take to be distinctive about my own understanding of the material. A good part of the cohesive effect of romanticism is due to the reciprocating engine of inclusion and exclusion from its 'circle'. This can result in substantial barriers to entry confronting the philosophical historian who is concerned to enter into its mode of thought on its own terms and yet keep her critical distance from the phenomenon. I attempt to bear this in mind and strike the balance.¹⁵

¹⁴ See, e.g., Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), ch. 21; Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) and *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 407–61, and *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Beiser, especially, stands in a significant teacher-student line of recent reception of romanticism: from Berlin to Taylor and from Taylor to Beiser.

¹⁵ Here is something of a *memento mori* for academics that I ran across when finalizing the typescript of the book for the publisher, a passage from Geoff Dyer (*Out of Sheer Rage: Wrestling with D. H. Lawrence* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)) about not writing a book about Lawrence. Dyer is giving due consideration to the merits of an academic book on his ostensible subject:

Hearing that I was 'working on Lawrence', an acquaintance lent me a book he thought I might find interesting: *A Longman Critical Reader on Lawrence*, edited by Peter Widdowson. I glanced at the contents page: old Eagleton was there, of course, together with some other state-of-the-art theorists: Lydia Blanchard on 'Lawrence, Foucault, and the Language of Sexuality' (in the section on 'Gender, Sexuality, Feminism'), Daniel J. Schneider on 'Alternatives to Logocentrism in D. H. Lawrence' (in the section featuring 'Post-Structuralist Turns'). I could feel myself getting angry and then I flicked through the introductory essay on 'Radical Indeterminacy: a post-modern Lawrence' and became angrier still. How could it have happened? How could these people with no feeling for literature have ended up *teaching* it, writing about it? I should have stopped there, should have avoided looking at any more, but I didn't because telling myself to stop always has the effect of urging me on. Instead, I kept looking at this group of wankers huddled in a circle, backs turned to the world so that no one would see them pulling each other off. Oh, it was too much, it was too stupid. I threw the book across the room and then I tried to tear it up but it was too resilient. By now I was blazing mad. I thought about getting Widdowson's phone number and making threatening calls. Then I looked around for the means to destroy his vile, filthy book. In the end it took a whole box of matches and some risk of personal injury before I succeeded in deconstructing it. (pp. 100–1)

Dyer's rant about professors fumbling their way through literature with the blunt, boorish tools of academic jargon has to smart. There is always a danger in scholarly work of draining the object of

A word on the title of the book: by calling the book *Irony and Idealism*, I do not mean to indicate that the book is a comparative study between two things, ‘irony’ and ‘idealism’, or that it is a treatment of the degree to which philosophical irony might find a home in idealism. I do not even mean to suggest that I devote equal time to discussing conceptions of irony, on the one hand, and idealism, on the other. Rather, as I hope will become clear in the course of the book, I contrast, at times rather starkly, some conceptions of irony I take to develop outside idealism in late eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century European philosophy with their beginning antagonist in Fichte and their criticism by Hegel. One might say that idealism plays the role in this book that Socrates does in Kierkegaard’s first book: a point of ‘constant reference’.

The Main Claims and Structure of the Argument

The Jena romantics—chiefly Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) and Friedrich Schlegel—self-consciously pursued a vision of what systematic philosophy would have to be if it were to register internally to itself and *in medias res* conditions of great perceived conceptual change. This ‘real-time’ and prospective relation of theory to change in historical circumstance is, to my knowledge, singular for the times. It is not that other philosophers were not concerned to argue for the constitutive importance of history on (some) concept formation, nor is it that other philosophers did not appreciate the volatile time in which they lived and thought. Herder, Schelling, Hegel, and others all in their own fashion had their eyes open to these concerns. But the Jena romantics made a special point of embedding in their conception of philosophical systematicity formal elements that guaranteed that their theories would be both as responsive as possible to unforeseen change and resistant to the dangerous impulse to collapse what is possible into what is actual ahead of its time. For the romantics the lesson of recently past history of philosophy—for them Jacobi, Goethe, Kant, and Fichte, as

inquiry of its intrinsic interest by taking such a studied distance from the object that vocabularies developed independent of the particular subject matter are loosed on it and take it over, garbling it beyond recognition. This is especially easy to do inadvertently when the ‘barriers to entry’ to a particular set of philosophical views are significantly higher than both the historical and contemporary mainstream, as they are in Jena romanticism. This danger is compounded by the stubborn literary character of much of the writings—even the systematic writings—of romanticism. So, while any philosophical writing must be general in order to be theoretical, I try to be mindful of the special demands of the material to be treated first and foremost as an article of deep interpretation and not simple explication. In this, of course I do not consider myself different from other writers on philosophical romanticism; I am merely coaching myself to develop a kind of regard to the target views that may be somewhat less clear-cut and dispassionate than the norm in dealing with other figures or schools in the history of philosophy.

well as what have come to be secondary and tertiary figures in the beginnings of post-Kantian German philosophy—was one in which order was replaced by disorder posing as a new order. While the Jena thinkers certainly styled themselves as in the philosophical thick of things when it came to advancing in a Kantian way beyond what they took to be the strictures of Kant's own systematic philosophy and did so in the way typical of the times, i.e. by propounding new systematic, highly reflexive treatments of what they took to be the basic philosophical issues, all of this was tempered by watchfulness. This circumspection renders the systematic thought of the Jena group explicitly tentative. Of course in a way Kant's own critical philosophy was tentative, indeed much more so than the German idealism of Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel that followed it. As I shall discuss more fully in the first and second chapters, the conditions on systematic 'closure' for Kant are a good deal less arduous than they are for later idealism, but Kant did consider critical philosophy, i.e. transcendental idealism, to be a closed system relative to a priori principles. True, such principles cannot at the furthest extent of their application—at the limit, so to speak, of the system—secure constitutive knowledge of a world that is not already structured according to them. The application of principles at the limit of systematicity, where they extend in a qualified way to the world ulterior to structuration by the principle, is what Kant calls 'merely regulative'. It is these sorts of principles that state the outward bounds of Kant's critical philosophy. So, the lack of epistemic closure around principles of the understanding for Kant does not signify lack of closure around rational principles. Kant's distinction between constitutive and regulative principles and the allied distinction between constitutive and regulative judgment effectively secure rational closure without, Kant holds, falling back into transcendent metaphysics. The tentativeness at the heart of early German romanticism is a radicalization of this aspect of Kant, one of the points the romantics hope to make by their repeated insistence that Kant's critical philosophy was not critical enough. In a sense that I hope to make palpable, the romantics took their principal philosophical project to be to linger amidst the emergence of philosophical alternatives in Europe at that time, to exist philosophically under the conditions of conceptual emergence *as such*. This brings me to the first of four theses that distinguish the approach I take from other interpretations of the philosophical significance of German romanticism.¹⁶

¹⁶ I do not use these theses as stated as points of reference in the main discussion in the body of the book; I offer them rather for purposes of initial orientation.

Thesis I: Regulative Romanticism—It is typical in discussions of German romanticism to take the romantics' reaction to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 to be of signal importance. This emphasis is historically well founded. Fichte's presence in Jena at the time that the main figures in the development of romanticism assembled there was the strongest proximate impetus to their initial philosophical activity. But nearness can obscure vision, and it is my contention in chapter one that the character of the romantics' reaction to Fichte—of their criticism of him and of their own views as they emerge from that criticism—is best seen as a radicalization of Kant's notion of regulative principles. Sometimes this Kantian provenance is explicit in the romantics, but often it is not. For my purposes that the tie is largely implicit is not a concern, for my intent is not to construct an interpretation of what is most revealing and significant about Jena romanticism around the actual influence of Kant's account of regulative principles and reflective judgment. Rather, the guiding ideas are (1) that a more radical form of Kant's use of these concepts is a powerful heuristic device for understanding the main philosophical substance of romanticism regardless of issues of influence and (2) that what is philosophically at stake in Kant's account of regulative reason, i.e. the re-importation into 'critical philosophy' of theodical rationalist metaphysical principles, underwent a radical shift at the hands of the romantics. The shift in question is one away from Kant's concern to assuage a sense of philosophical displacement that might result from an absolute cognitive ban on such principles toward an even more attenuated, 'optative' stance towards them. It is important to emphasize that Novalis and Schlegel do not merely transport Kant's conception of regulative reason into romanticism. Kant's account requires the principles guiding regulative uses of reason and regulative judgment to be transcendently necessary. By contrast Schlegel rejects precisely this status in favor of a more contingent, historical, and pragmatic approach. So, I shall argue that these Kantian ideas provide a particularly revealing *model* for romanticism, one that is an important supplement to present approaches to understanding the phenomenon. I am not claiming, however, that this in itself provides a sufficient template for understanding and critically assessing German romanticism, and chapter one discusses other relevant sources for such understanding and criticism.

* * *

Attempting to capture by the means of theory an ongoing experience of emerging new philosophical conceptions without collapsing the emergence prematurely into conceptual stability was a volatile project from the start. The romantics on my interpretation of them calculated it to be so, and the most calculating,

outrageous, and calculatingly outrageous of the romantics is the main subject of chapter one: Friedrich Schlegel. This forms my second point of departure from standard treatments of German romanticism:

Thesis II: The Precedence of Schlegel—Quite often it is the case that historians of philosophy who discuss the significance of early German romanticism elevate Novalis to the status of a preeminent figure. This precedence of Novalis over Schlegel in particular has had crossover appeal for interpretations of German romanticism, marking *both* treatments that insist upon a hardline distinction between idealism and romanticism (e.g. Frank)¹⁷ and those that do not insist upon such a distinction (e.g. Beiser).¹⁸ I wish to invert this order of precedence and argue that it is Schlegel, *not* Novalis, who represents the most interesting philosophical aspects of German romanticism. Typically discussions of Schlegel emphasize ‘irony’ as something on the order of a master concept in terms of which one views other components of his philosophical position. I shall argue that this way of proceeding, as reasonable as it may initially seem given the texts, is philosophically not as productive as an alternative approach. I view Schlegel’s doctrine of irony, rather, as a result of logically concomitant analyses of (1) the relation between self-consciousness and belief and of (2) the further relation of (1) to the matter of ongoing practical agency and existential orientation. Building

¹⁷ See also Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen* (Berlin: Fleischel, 1911), pp. 115f. (This often goes hand in hand with an emphasis on *Naturphilosophie* in early German romanticism.) Frank might contest this characterization, but I stand by it. Frank writes appreciatively and deeply about Schlegel, particularly in more recent work (see *Auswege aus dem Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2007), chs. 3–4). But I do not take it that he has changed his claims that the *Fichte-Studien* is the single most important work in early German romanticism. See *Einführung*, p. 248.

¹⁸ There are two strands of thought here. In the first, the romantics, and particularly Novalis, are assimilated to Hegel. The classic treatment is Theodor Haering, *Novalis als Philosoph* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1954). Specifically, Haering interprets Novalis to prefigure Hegel’s extension of structures of self-consciousness to nature. Such an extension is not merely the Kantian point that objects must appear according to fundamental subjective cognitive conditions, but the more radical one that nature is, antecedent to any cognitive impacts structured like, or even is, self-consciousness. I will not stress *Naturphilosophie* in this study, as it does not hold much contemporary philosophical interest without very substantial reconstruction. That said, Haering’s treatment of many issues in Novalis still stands up well, and I shall suggest in chapter two that Hegel and Schlegel are close on some points but also that it is just this proximity that accentuates their very different treatment of other matters. In my view, the differences outweigh the similarities. Beiser is less overt in his Hegelian interpretation. In the second strand, the romantics, and again particularly Novalis, are viewed as followers of Fichte, perhaps offering better grounds for central Fichtean doctrines. Hegel thought this (although he wavered about whether the romantics improved on Fichte). A more recent interpretation of this sort is offered in Géza von Molnár, *Novalis’ “Fichte Studies”: The Foundations of His Aesthetics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970). Molnár argues that the improvement is a more robust account of regulative reason. In part, I agree with this assessment, but differ on the nature of the improvement and on whether it is an effective critique of Fichte.

on the investigation of the role of regulative thought in romanticism generally (the Regulative Romanticism Thesis above), I turn in a deeper way to the details of Schlegel's overall account and scrutinize irony as the expression from within subjective agency of the force of regulative principles and ideas on one. Put another way, Schlegel's main philosophical and literary project in the years of 1796 to 1801, as I understand it, is to express his first-personal sense of lived regulative cognitive and cultural orientation. This may sound phenomenological or existential in spirit, and so it is. Schlegel offers himself and his meditations on the relation of himself to stabilizing and destabilizing cognitive and conative stock as he experienced it in his time as a philosophical 'test case'. Schlegel further claims that this is all philosophy worth its salt can do, at least if it is going to be properly responsive to its historical situation, i.e. be something on the order of a self-consciously lived experiment. When put in this context, Schlegel's conception of irony can be seen to have more to do, again, with an early historicizing and hermeneutic form of pragmatism than with the relativism with which it is often taxed. Placing irony in a fundamental philosophical position without situating it firmly in the broader context of Schlegel's concerns gives away too much to his critics from Hegel onwards. In keeping with this approach to Schlegel's thought, I shall understand the various modalities of philosophical self-expression in Schlegel—his 'fragments'—and the systematicity they involve to instantiate a conception of reason according to which any principle as a foundational matter is regulative.

* * *

Hegel subjected Jena romanticism and associated movements to unstinting criticism, and that criticism proved as a historical matter to be extraordinarily efficacious. Hegel's interpretation of Jena romanticism all but sealed its fate as a philosophical position worth considering seriously in the nineteenth century. This is especially true of Schlegel (Novalis' early death and Schlegel's later career as a revisionist conservative apologist for Metternich assured that Hegel's attention fell squarely on the latter and not the former). Hegel's interpretation of philosophical romanticism is in turn a main ingredient in Kierkegaard's understanding of irony. The essential points of Hegel's negative judgment are still deployed today, either to generally marginalize German romanticism as a historically significant philosophical movement and argue that it is still irrelevant today as a source of philosophical reflection or, more specifically, to undercut the philosophical integrity of Schlegel's ironism. Chapter two deals with questions of Hegel's negative assessment of romanticism. On the one hand, if the Thesis of Regulative Romanticism is well founded and it can be shown that Hegel's interpretation of romanticism is mistaken in ways that can be accounted for by

the Thesis, then the force of Hegel's assessment of romanticism is blunted. (As it turns out, by implication Hegel allows for the Thesis of the Precedence of Schlegel.) Showing Hegel to be mistaken in this manner may be an important first step, but it is a less satisfying philosophical result than one that addresses at a deeper level what aspects of Hegel's own views provide the impetus for the misunderstanding. That is less satisfying still than a demonstration that aspects of Hegel's views preordain a certain misunderstanding of Schlegel because those views are uncomfortably close to Schlegel's own. This leads to the third thesis:

Thesis III—Hegel's Irresolute Romanticism: One of the consequences of viewing the deep structure of Schlegel's thought in terms of regulative reason is that the sense in which Schlegel's conception of reason is *dialectical* sharpens. There are several ways in which one might characterize the root philosophical issue between Schlegel and Hegel. One particularly revealing way is to understand their main dispute to involve differing but related accounts of the structure of dialectic. Hegelian dialectic dictates conditions for its own systematic closure; Schlegel's ironic dialectic does precisely the opposite, specifying systematically constraints on non-closure. The basic conceptual orientation of Hegel's philosophical system is retrospective and autotelic. Schlegel's deliberately provocative conception of a system of fragments is inherently prospective and tentative. Hegel's concern with the agency of any one subject is secondary. For Schlegel the experience of ones subjectivity is paramount as to both the content and structure of a philosophical system. These are major disagreements between two strongly holistic ways of treating concepts, beliefs, desires, etc. But the matter is made even more pointed by the claim Hegel makes to the effect that it is a property of a successful philosophical system that it be able to indicate and analyze the deficiencies of prior philosophical positions immanently—i.e. by using only the conceptual resources present in the target theory.¹⁹ Any ultimately successful theory has to preserve in its explicit structure the truth content of prior views suitably reconstructed. It is well known that Hegel conceives of whole-theory philosophical development (as well as other sorts of cognitive/conative development) as proceeding stepwise through more and more adequate theories. He also makes various claims concerning the necessity of transitions between theories and about the necessity of the entire cumulative line of progression. Hegel treats

¹⁹ I am using the term 'theory' here loosely. It is crucial for Hegel that philosophers not treat the various standpoints of *Geist* in merely cognitive terms. The word 'Weltanschauung' is perhaps a bit threadbare nowadays, but it better captures Hegel's intent.

romanticism as one such theory in various of his works; one that is dialectically close to his own by his own admission. More specifically, Hegel casts romanticism as he understands it as the last stage in the progression of dialectical reason that attempts to take a pre-social conception of subjectivity as its core precept. Now, a large part in the development of the terminal stages in the dialectic of reason leading up to Hegel's own theory is a very explicit philosophical awareness of the operation of dialectic within those stages. Because this is so, romantic dialectic, as instantiated in irony, is proximate to Hegel's own conception of dialectic. Once one sees clearly how close the positions of Schlegel and Hegel must be by Hegel's own lights, one is in a position to pose the further question: whence the uncharacteristic harshness and disdain for romanticism, which is after all a prior *essential* philosophical view according to Hegel? The answer chapter two suggests is that Hegel views Schlegel as dialectically irresolute, as unable to embrace the conditions for dialectical closure that Hegel deems apparent and necessary. This concerns Hegel more than do the deficiencies of other prior philosophical positions because he considers being irresolute in this manner to be a live option for philosophers of his time and, thus, as more dangerous than other views. Romanticism, that is, is detrimental and attractive to the dialectically precocious, a Faustian bargain that exchanges an empty, pure power of cogitative variation for perdition. This is no doubt one of the reasons Hegel deems romanticism 'Evil' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²⁰ But one person's irresolution is apt to be another's resoluteness, and in this vein it may be open for Schlegel to level the countercharge against Hegel of 'jumping the gun', i.e. of being so captive to the anxiety of re-establishing philosophical stability after Kant that he, Hegel, domesticates the true nature of dialectic. In essence, the charge would be that Hegel exhibits a different form of irresolution. To be resolute, from the romantic standpoint, is precisely to deny oneself the sort of resolution Hegel craves.

* * *

This relation of Schlegel's and Hegel's thought, as well as the philosophical career of the concept of irony in early- to mid-nineteenth-century thought, is complicated and deepened by Kierkegaard. The third chapter attempts a triangulation between: (1) Kierkegaard's adaptation of Hegel's dialectic; (2) Kierkegaard's early, rather Hegelian interpretation of Schlegel in the *Concept of Irony*; and (3) Kierkegaard's adaptation of aspects of romantic irony in his own later views. The main contentions of the chapter are that Kierkegaard's views on irony evolve

²⁰ Hegel does not name a romantic philosopher or even romanticism as the substance of 'Evil', but the ascription is obvious, or so I shall argue.

from his early to his more mature work, that this evolution is crucial to the development of core aspects of his mature view, and that the key doctrine here is that of humor. The claim that humor is central to Kierkegaard's developed position is not in itself novel, but its relation to Kierkegaard's reception of Schlegelian irony has not been fully appreciated. Moreover, what discussion there is of the complex Schlegel-Hegel-Kierkegaard motif in conceptions of irony/humor is not informed by an understanding of Schlegel as a dialectical thinker. But this is precisely the aspect of Schlegel's thought that has continuing positive relevance for Kierkegaard. Accordingly, the last main thesis that I shall defend is:

Thesis IV—Kierkegaard the Ironist: Kierkegaard initially refurbishes the concept of romantic irony in Hegelian ways, but does so slyly in order to redeploy the concept over and against Hegel as a critique of 'the system' or 'science'. Kierkegaard's conception of 'controlled irony', and allied types of 'humor' (also a category repurposed from Hegel), are central to the basic formal structuring device of his mature thought, i.e. the idea of spheres of existence. A transformed conception of irony, responsive to and critical of both its romantic and Hegelian sources, comes back into currency in nineteenth-century thought in Kierkegaard.

Taken together the claims and approaches, I hope, add up to a distinctive overall view of an important arc in early to mid-nineteenth-century European philosophy. I hope that the approach offered here is a genuine alternative to existing ones, both in its elevation of Schlegel over Novalis and in its particular exposition and critique of Schlegel's views. I hope as well that there is something new in the treatments of the relation of Hegel to romanticism and of Kierkegaard's complicated and formative refashioning of irony both as a method for the critique of what he takes to be Hegel's position on the relation of systematicity to experience and as a blueprint for his own account of radical subjectivity. Overall, one may regard the project of the book in two complementary ways. In wide angle, it tells the story of the career of a concept, 'irony', from the mid-1790s to the mid-1850s. But the book also offers several close-up shots of systematic complexity involving irony (and outrigger concepts) present in the thought of individual thinkers.

1

Jena Romanticism and the Philosophical Significance of Irony

‘Early German romanticism’ is a deceptively imprecise designation, which refers not so much to a unified set of *doctrines* but rather to a provisional intellectual *group* or the *activity* of that group present at a certain time and in a certain geographic place. The relevant time is remarkably brief, roughly the five years from 1796 to 1801; the relevant place was the university city of Jena.¹ The group of thinkers was itself hardly constant; it is more accurate to say that the group dilated and contracted around a hub provided by the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel. The informal nature of the group, informal even by the standards of a university town, seems to have been almost by design, and many who came to do the most important work in romanticism, both philosophically and artistically, passed through Jena: Ludwig Tieck, Jean Paul Richter, and most importantly Friedrich von Hardenberg (who had taken by that time the pen-name ‘Novalis’). Still others communicated with the Jena thinkers from a distance, for example Schleiermacher and Wackenroder. Even the Schlegels were in and out of Jena during these years. Crucial aspects of Friedrich Schlegel’s philosophical development take place in Dresden (1794–6) and, especially, Berlin (1797–9), where he became close to Schleiermacher. So, while Schlegel lived in Jena for a year in the interim (1796–7) and a year after (1799–1801), the Dresden and Berlin stays were by no means incidental. Still, the intersection of the many paths of those who became known as ‘romantics’ was Jena.

The standing philosophical presence in Jena during most of these years—one might wish to argue that this presence in itself made Jena the hotbed of a continuing philosophical development—was Fichte, who had taken up Reinhold’s

¹ See Theodor Ziolkowski, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena. Geist und Gesellschaft 1794/95* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998) for the more restrictive claim that May 1794 to June of the next year is most relevant.

chair in ‘Kantian philosophy’ there.² Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis separately took up study of the 1794 version of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*; in both cases the study was autodidactic and, perhaps in a way that only autodidactic study can be, deeply orienting. That said, the cases of Schlegel and Novalis as students of Fichtean systematic philosophy are a good deal more different than is commonly supposed, and these differences aid in exhibiting Schlegel and Novalis as quite distinctive in their philosophical concerns and approaches.

Schlegel had already passed through a period of thought—one might even say two periods in quick succession—that involved a broad though uneven study of the history of ancient and modern philosophy and its connection to questions of literary evaluation. Later in this chapter we shall turn to consider some aspects of this earlier phase in Schlegel’s thought relevant to his philosophical romanticism in greater detail. For now it is enough to give a compressed characterization of this ‘pre-romantic’ Schlegel.

At first Schlegel is concerned with a variation on a theme present in much German-language intellectual work of the time, i.e. neo-classicism, with a special emphasis on the Greek context. This phase in his thought produces one of Schlegel’s most famous works, the essay ‘Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie’ (1795, published 1797). This document is less important for its role in the ongoing debate in German letters concerning the relative merits of ‘classical’ and ‘modern’ poetry than it is as the beginning of Schlegel’s intellectual evolution. Forgoing for now the details of his argument, Schlegel sides firmly with Winckelmann as against Lessing in finding Greek poetry superior to modern poetry, taking the latter to be merely ‘interesting’ but the former to have a unifying function in culture that is impossible to recapture. Shakespeare, a figure who was to become extremely important to Schlegel in his Berlin years with Schleiermacher, is put forward as the epitome of the modern on account of Hamlet’s perfect internal ‘dissonance’ (*Dissonanz*) (KFSA 1: 247–8).³ By the time

² Schlegel and Novalis both saw in Fichte the rightful intellectual heir to Kant. Fichte takes to greater heights Kant’s critical revolution: ‘If the great theme of the critical philosophy is the unity of the determined with determining then the thing and thought are in pre-established harmony and Fichte really is Kant to the second power’ (AFr 281, KFSA 2: 213). In the same fragment Schlegel writes that, if one looks with the ‘intensity of Fichte’, Fichte’s philosophy and Kant’s are ‘identical’, and it is clear that the terms in which they are identical are Fichte’s. Fichte is in firm control of much that is relevant in Kant, utilizing Kant as one might an instrument or aid: ‘Kant is the bloodhound of philosophy, Fichte the hunter’ (PhL I.ii. 420, KFSA 18: 61). In perhaps his most quoted (and quotable) fragment Schlegel offers that ‘[t]he French Revolution, Fichte’s philosophy, and Goethe’s *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age’ (AFr 216, KFSA 2: 198–9).

³ Michael Forster quite rightly points to the importance of Herder for Schlegel’s development of these points. See *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 12–13.

the essay appears, however, Schlegel had reconsidered his view in light of the contrast, more favorable to the modern, that Schiller draws between 'naïve' and 'sentimental' poetry.⁴ Schiller's role in converting Schlegel from relatively unqualified classicism to a more moderate view has been well documented for some time; A. O. Lovejoy and others have emphasized this early obeisance to Schiller (something Schlegel himself gladly admits in the preface to the published version of the essay in 1797).⁵ More recently, questions have rightly been raised concerning how much the change is due to Schiller's essay.⁶ The allegiance to Schiller turned out to be short-lived; nevertheless, that shift in Schlegel's thought is prerequisite to his romanticism. This reevaluation of the merits of modern poetry relative to classic poetry also coincides with Schlegel's immersion in Kant's 'critical philosophy' and, with it, his study of Kant's near contemporaries (e.g. Herder) and predecessors (e.g. Leibniz, Spinoza). Schlegel's pre-Fichte period, then, was full of engagements with philosophy and philosophical analyses of literature.

Not so Novalis: his philosophical thought seems to be inaugurated by his study of Fichte. This has two immediate effects on his written assessments of Fichte. First, because they constitute Novalis' first sustained philosophical engagement, they are extremely concentrated, almost obsessively written. That is, there is an intensity and urgency bordering on intellectual frenzy present in the writings now collected under the title *Fichte-Studien*.⁷ Novalis knew very few competitors to Fichtean foundationalism, and this allows an absolute, uncluttered focus on certain issues. This is not to say that Novalis knew nothing of the then current debates with Jacobi and Reinhold, but that knowledge was incomplete and refracted through the lens of his concern for Fichte. These features of Novalis' reception of Fichte's writings make his criticism of Fichte much more continuous and treatise-like in presentation than that of Schlegel, the latter of which are mostly contained in the fragments collected by him under the planned title of the *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (1797f.)⁸ This makes Novalis' criticisms more

⁴ 'Über naïve und sentimentalische Poesie', NA 20: 413–503 [original=1795].

⁵ KFSA 1: 209–11.

⁶ See, e.g., Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 116–21, who gives main credit to the Niethammer group. Cf. note 25, this chapter.

⁷ Penelope Fitzgerald makes vivid this aspect of Novalis's personality and style of thought in her reimagining of the period prior to his sustained philosophical work. See *The Blue Flower* (London: Flamingo, 1995).

⁸ This is not to say that Schlegel's criticisms of Fichte are ancillary to his philosophical development, nor is it to say that those criticisms are not a central part of the philosophical power of Jena romanticism more generally. I discuss Schlegel's critique of Fichte and the resulting doctrine of the *Wechselerweis* in this chapter in subsection A of the section 'Schlegel's Insight'.

accessible to historians of philosophy, in that unearthing the main lines of criticism does not involve penetrating Schlegel's more gnomic philosophical expression. To put the point another way, more internal to Jena romanticism: the *Fichte-Studien* are not properly speaking a collection of 'fragments' in the romantic sense of that technical term, even though the work comprises notes and reads like a *Tagebuch*. All in all, these features conspire to give the impression that Novalis' criticisms of Fichte enjoy pride of place in the assessment of early German romanticism. Second, because they are limited to Fichte and are relatively straightforward in manner, the *Fichte-Studien* can make it seem that responses to Fichte all but exhaust the repertoire of Jena romanticism. That serves to cut off early German romanticism from its important historical and conceptual antecedents a generation earlier than Fichte, like Jacobi, Hamann, and Herder. Schlegel's ambit prior to and after Fichte is a much fairer representation of these ties and, more importantly, draws on conceptual resources found in this tradition, providing him richer tools than Novalis for constructing a conception of romanticism. In short: the impression both that Novalis' reaction to Fichte is philosophically superior to Schlegel's and that Fichte is the be-all-and-end-all of romantic reflection are based in convenience rather than philosophical judgment. I shall challenge both in what follows.

Some Preliminaries

Before pursuing the specifics of Schlegel's and Novalis' reactions to Fichte, it is necessary to survey the philosophical landscape in order to situate Fichte's project in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* in terms of the philosophical issues of the day to which it was a response. It is not, however, worthwhile in the intended ambit of the present study to engage in lengthy table-setting, and what follows should in no sense be taken as an intrinsically adequate, let alone exhaustive, account of the major issues and trends in philosophy from the time of Kant to Reinhold. There is just now much penetrating work in the history of this short but significant period in the development of idealism. Rather, I wish to provide at the outset of this chapter only a schematic overview of that development, as it is relevant to Fichte and in terms that carry over to Schlegel and Novalis. These are not the only such terms, and I shall later in this chapter suggest other points of important contact, but one cannot begin with everything at once.

Kant's philosophy and the German idealism that follows it are primarily accounts of the nature and claimed basic role of self-consciousness in thought. Of course self-consciousness also plays a crucial role in rationalism, and one of the most revolutionary aspects of Kant's project is to approach questions of

self-consciousness by bifurcating two aspects of self-consciousness that traditionally had been treated in a unitary fashion. Kant allows of course that cognitive subjects can be conscious of their own mental states, that is, both of the fact that there are such states and of what they have in the way of content. One might think it reasonable to amplify this simple idea and also include in the inventory of what one can become aware of at second-order one's agency in so being aware. But Kant famously contends that, if what one means by 'self-consciousness' also includes consciousness of this agency as of a special sort of object, i.e. 'the self', to be found within the manifold of one's experience, then there is no such object and, thus, no such *self*-consciousness. The 'self' is not an item in experience in this context; any form of explicit self-consciousness is limited to the phenomenal inventory of first-order possible awareness. Nonetheless Kant continues, there is an implicit sort of self-consciousness that is not conceptual in any normal sense, but is rather completely formal. This form of self-consciousness does not show up in the phenomenal field but must be presupposed philosophically in order to account for the possibility of continuous streams of objective experience that can be ascribed by subjects to themselves as their own. That is, Kant holds that it must be possible to conjoin with any manifold of experience an 'I think' in order to philosophically vouchsafe the thoughts that (A) what I am conscious of now I am conscious of and that (B) what I am conscious of now is part of a stream of consciousness that extends beyond the occurrent. This form of self-consciousness, to repeat, is non-descriptive and non-referential, i.e. a completely formal operation—it is not an *awareness of any thing*, self or otherwise. For Kant it is crucial to keep the explicit and implicit forms of self-consciousness conceptually apart from one another as a matter of epistemology, as they are completely different in epistemic form and function. To do otherwise causes one to fall into systematic philosophical error.

Roughly speaking, German idealism after Kant attempts to force back together these two strands in a way that, nevertheless, avoids positing what Kant found so problematic, i.e. a self that can be known by finite, discursive beings to be a thing or, more specifically, a substance. The first proposal to reunify the (implicit) self-referential and (explicit) experiential senses of self-consciousness under this constraint is K. L. Reinhold's 'Principle of Consciousness'.

Reinhold considered himself initially to be an expositor of Kant's critical philosophy, and his *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie* (1786/90) spread the word about Kant's system, although they did so by means of selective attention to the part of Kant that most interested Reinhold, i.e. the ethical theory. Reinhold came to believe that Kant's theoretical philosophy as a whole might be buttressed and made more accessible to the general intellectual public by a more exacting

account than Kant himself had provided of the necessary conditions for the possibility of consciousness of objects. Reinhold's focus on 'necessary conditions for the possibility of x ' marks his enterprise as transcendental, and he clearly understood it in this way. (It is perhaps worth mentioning that it is certain that Kant would not have accepted as friendly amendments Reinhold's 'improvements', but I shall not linger on the point.) Reinhold's views in this regard are set out in three principal works, published back to back in a flurry of philosophical activity just upon his assuming the newly established chair for 'Kantian Philosophy' in Jena (the one Fichte took up after Reinhold's departure): *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (1789), *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen* (vol. 1, 1790), and *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (1791). Although these works stand for only a single phase of many in Reinhold's career, their influence on the development of idealism was such that they are sometimes identified with Reinhold's philosophy as a whole.⁹ The most significant aspect of Reinhold's thought is the specific way that he characterizes the purported need to reunite the transcendental and experiential aspects of self-consciousness: he holds that philosophy following Kant must establish a new form of *systematicity*. The form must be new because old (what Kant might have called 'dogmatic') forms of systematicity were no longer adequate after Kant had revolutionized the relation of metaphysics to epistemology. However, Kant either had failed to provide the appropriate kind of systematic philosophy as a replacement or, slightly more charitably, had failed to provide guidelines for the same. This is Reinhold's famous call for 'scientific' philosophy in the Kantian mode, a call that attracted all German idealists in one way or another up through Hegel. Reinhold was very impressed by holistic accounts of the nature of theories. To Reinhold's mind Kant's accounts of the relation of pure intuition to category, of inclination to duty, and more generally of theoretical to practical reason are not (or, again, more charitably: do not appear to be) internally consistent. This is because Kant did not derive these apparently dichotomous elements in his philosophy from a single, basic common principle (*Grundsatz*) that would, in virtue of being commonly related at a more 'elementary' level, show that they were indeed consistent with one another: the so-called 'Principle of Consciousness'. In order to be properly foundational, this principle must be self-evidently true, i.e. what Reinhold calls a

⁹ Reinhold came to retract his views in this period under pressure of Fichte's criticism of them. See *Ueber die Paradoxien der neuesten Philosophie* (1799). Reinhold was uncommonly open to accepting refutation, a trait that endeared him to his students (some of whom came to take Fichte's side in the matter).

'fact of consciousness' (*Tatsache des Bewußtseins*). The 'of' here expresses both a subjective and objective genitive: the principle states a fact about consciousness of which there can be consciousness awareness.

In the *Beyträge* Reinhold states the foundational principle as: 'in consciousness the representation is distinguished by the subject from the subject and the object, and is related to both of them.'¹⁰ And in *Über das Fundament* one finds: 'in consciousness representation is distinguished by the subject from both object and subject and is referred back to both.'¹¹ The formulations are not precisely equivalent, but are close enough to one another that one can discern a common structure. Both statements suggest that there is a complex form of self-consciousness at the base of all experience, such that the knowledge of this basis can properly ground a philosophy that is 'scientific' in the sense in which Reinhold is interested. Any conscious state (i.e. any representing) is one in which the conscious subject is engaged in two activities simultaneously. In the first of these, the subject *differentiates* itself from two other components internal to representation taken as a whole: (A) its own representing activity and (B) the object represented. In the second activity, the subject *identifies* representation as having a shared provenance in both the representing subject and the represented object. Only with all of these components in these relations of differentiation and identity is there the possibility of conscious representation. The structure of consciousness expressed in Reinhold's *Grundsatz* is, accordingly, 'dialectical' in the sense that becomes characteristic of German idealism. The basic structure from which subjectivity and objectivity emerge—their 'common root'—is internally articulated in reciprocal, co-primitive relations that obtain between three elements necessary for the state in question: the representing subject, the represented object,

¹⁰ BBM I: 167–8. Taking 'representation' to be a key concept is more of a departure from Kant than it might at first seem to be. Passages in which Kant discusses representation (*Vorstellung*) are copious, but Kant had a technical sense of the term that is at some conceptual distance from the prior conceptions of the term in modern philosophy. See the fine discussion in Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 110–12. There are several reasons why Reinhold focuses on representation as the key concept around which he will attempt to unify and systematize Kant. The first is strategic. Reinhold seems to assume that grounding subjectivity in terms of representational capacities has enough general acceptability, since everyone can understand readily what representation is, to carry Kant's epistemology to the public. Second and more substantively, 'representation' according to Reinhold is the broadest category inclusive of the cognitive products of the three Kantian faculties that Reinhold seeks to reduce, and thus offers itself, he thinks, as a very likely candidate for their 'common root'. Kant discusses this common root in § VII of the 'Introduction' to the first *Critique*, where he says that such a common root is 'unknown to us' (*uns unbekannt*) (A15/B29). This formulation does not explicitly rule out the *possibility* of locating such a root.

¹¹ ÜF 77.

and the representing itself. This is just what representation primordially is; it is a structure in which the primitive elements come into being as they come into relation with one another in the act of representing. It clearly involves the two terms of the above schema of self-consciousness—in particular, transcendental self-consciousness is present in the tacit nature of the structure and the requirement that it be present in the representing subject in order for any coherent representation of objects to be possible. But it might seem, given this explication of the nature of the principle, that experiential self-consciousness takes a back seat to referential self-consciousness, as is the case in Kant. There is, however, an experiential dimension to the *Grundsatz* as well. Reinhold maintains that one can experience this basic state or activity, indeed that is part of its appeal as a candidate for a proper philosophical foundation. So, when he insists that the principle is not a mere concept but a ‘fact of consciousness’ (*Tatsache des Bewußtseins*) Reinhold means to emphasize both that the principle is basic *and* that it is an article of experience, one that does not require for its unearthing any special philosophical reflection, merely introspection.¹² Reinhold holds, as anyone attempting to bridge Kantian abstractions and ‘popular philosophy’ must, that the requisite depth of philosophical reflection is quite minimal; as a matter of principle, the fact is open to anyone who possesses standard perceptual and intellectual capacities and a little motivation.

Reinhold’s attempt to ground subjectivity in one all-encompassing principle was the subject of immediate and intense debate, which has been amply documented and discussed in the literature on early idealism.¹³ Considering the intricacies of rival accounts of the transmission of Reinhold’s position to Fichte would take us away from the main points relevant to an assessment of the romantics’ responses to Fichte.

Like Reinhold Fichte holds the view that reflective consciousness depends on a pre-discursive tripartite structure, i.e. that the subject can be reflectively conscious (i.e. can represent) only if something distinctly other than the subject stands to it *as* other than it. This requirement, that what is other be taken at least

¹² BBM I: 143–4.

¹³ Work on this topic is copious. See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Skepticism, Transcendental Arguments, and Systematicity in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 219ff.; Ameriks, *The Fate of Autonomy*, pp. 170ff.; Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA), pp. 276ff.; Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 70ff.; Frank, ‘Unendliche Annäherung’, pp. 485ff.; Wayne Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte’s Jena Project* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 88f.; Dieter Henrich, ‘Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht’, in *Subjektivität und Metaphysik*, ed. D. Henrich and H. Wagner (Frankfurt a/M: Klostermann, 1966), pp. 188–232.

minimally to be other than the subject by the subject, is one of the imports of Fichte's doctrine of *positing*. The term 'positing' (*Setzen*) originates in the vocabulary of German rationalistic logic, but the sense in which Fichte uses it involves agency in a way modern conceptions of pure logical deployment do not.¹⁴ That the subject ('the I') 'posits' itself absolutely *and* the barest specification of its object ('the not-I')—as Fichte holds—means that the subject *takes* the object to be other than itself, and this taking the object to be so, i.e. to have the meaning *qua* object of being-other-than-the-subject, is itself a product of the subject's activity.¹⁵ In other words, the positing subject spontaneously constructs a certain status for items that are 'not it': they are taken to be objects that stand in relations of 'being-other-than-the-subject' *by the subject*, and thus to 'define' the subject for itself over and against the object-as-other. This 'appearing-other-than-the subject-to-the-subject' is the minimal, abstract notion of an object of consciousness that concerns Fichte. The absolute I's self-positing is radically free; the positing of a not-I, even though still a positing and thus an activity of the I, operates as a 'check' (*Anstoß*) on the activity of the I. This is the material out of which Fichte hopes to generate a theory of objectivity, but it is important to stress that the check is only a check because the I directs it back on itself—the check does not fall, that is, outside the purview of the I's freedom. Fichte, like Reinhold, considers his undertaking to amplify features latent in Kant. In Fichte's eyes, Kant only presupposes a primitive division between the subject and object of conscious experience, thereby rendering his account of transcendental synthesis insufficient to ground properly that division.

In order for there to be even so much as reflective consciousness, consciousness must be directed toward an 'object' as a point of reference under the specification above: something minimally discrete from the conscious subject. But an object's being other *than* the subject presupposes that the object constitutes a limit on the subject. In Fichte's way of speaking, the otherness of the object to the subject registers to the subject that it, i.e. that the subject, is finite. This means that the subject's reflective consciousness, and possible reflective self-awareness, is intimately tied to its limitation or finitude, for what makes the subject discrete is a component necessary for reflection to obtain at all. Because the possibility of reflection entails finitude, nothing that is infinite could be reflectively conscious nor could one be reflectively conscious of anything infinite. This relationship

¹⁴ To be a bit more specific, the term has its origin in the terminology of rationalist *psychologia empirica*. In this tradition, issues of agency in making claims are present in a subdued manner. Still, in post-Fregean non-psychologistic conceptions of logic, such concerns are out of play.

¹⁵ GA I.2: 285.

between 'I' and 'not-I' cannot itself be an item of reflective experience—i.e. 'experience' in the standard idealist sense of the term—for it is a transcendental presupposition, a structure from which experience emerges in the first place. This is just to reiterate that Fichte treats positing as a pre-discursive activity. Fichte does allow, however, that one has implicit, non-reflective awareness of the absolute freedom of the I in its positing activity.¹⁶ But once one turns reflectively to consider this more immediate awareness, it is transmuted into reflective terms and its more immediate status is unavailable as a matter of reflective experience. Positing cannot arise to the level of explicit consciousness, therefore, in its primordial form. Fichte construes the basic structure not as a *state* (representational or otherwise) but as an *activity* (*Tathandlung*)—as the basic form of *practice*. Fichte did not inaugurate the idea that knowledge, and indeed consciousness, is a form of practical activity, that thinking is action; versions of this idea are central to Hamann, Herder, and thinkers outside the German tradition like Vico. But it is plausible to claim that Fichte was first in the line of transcendental philosophers following Kant to stress this radical form of the 'primacy of the practical'. This inaugural idealist attempt to model pre-discursive forms of agency within the domain of discursive awareness is crucial for the Jena romantics, both as a point of departure and as an object of critique.

Fichte's position developed between 1794 and 1798 in two other aspects that are relevant to Jena romanticism. The first development concerns the scope of specification of the not-I. By the mid-1790s Fichte came to embrace the view that the basic entity that both serves as a constitutive focal point for the subject and acts as its defining limitation cannot be just any object. Such a not-I must be another I (a not-I I, if one wanted to compound technical terms). The reasoning

¹⁶ See GA I.4: 271–2. Cf. Kant's discussion of self-knowledge or -experience in inner sense. There have been attempts to overcome textual inconsistencies in Kant's position (at times he says no such experience of the I is possible because the I is not given as such in the manifold of inner sense, while at other times Kant seems to hold that such knowledge is possible) by adapting the modern resources of theories of direct reference. The basic move, I take it, is to argue that direct reference by the I to the I (and thus 'experience' of it) can be accomplished without any given I in inner sense in the same way that direct reference does not require a description to guide it. Such reference would not be, strictly speaking, an ascription to the self, for want of a better word, 'I-ness'. Whatever one thinks of the pertinence of this move to solve a riddle in Kant, it will not do as an explication of the awareness of the I's aboriginal activity in Fichte. First, it is clear that Fichte holds that such awareness would have to be unconscious or at least implicit, and this does not jibe well with reference, which would seem to have to be explicit. Second, that the awareness is unconscious allows Fichte to hold—in tension with Kant—that such awareness must in fact accompany representation and not merely that it is possible for it to do so. One may bring out the combined force of these points (perhaps even in ways that impinge on the Kantian case) simply by observing that any first-person self-reference, no matter how non-descriptive, would require thought that is grammatically structured by the accusative case—i.e. I refer to *me*. This would be too objectual for Fichte, if not for Kant.

to this conclusion, as it appears in the main text that forwards the view, the *Foundations of Natural Right* (1795/6), is torturous and forbidding, but the main arc of thought is relatively straightforward and can be set forth in outline. It would seem *prima facie* true that for Fichte any object would function to both (1) initiate experientially and require transcendently the *contrast* between I and not-I and (2) render the I both distinct from and *dependent* on the not-I as finite in virtue of the posit. But how is the limitation of (2) registered in the structure of the I? Fichte seems to have recognized a fairly straightforward possibility: that the I, so determined by the not-I, might be limited by the not-I deterministically. At least that result is not ruled out by the doctrine of positing present in the 1794 statement of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and if one thought of empirical instantiations of the not-I primarily in terms of natural objects, the result even might seem obvious. The 1795/6 work attempts to block this result, and the 'new method' of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in lectures from 1797/8 incorporates in its approach lessons drawn from the earlier attempt. If the not-I were bound by causal-mechanistic laws, any limitation of the subject by it would likewise be constrained, and because the limitation of the subject by the object is constitutive of subjectivity, the subject would be causally constrained. But, like Kant, Fichte dearly wants to preserve human freedom at base transcendental levels. Fichte does not argue for the reality of human freedom, but takes it as a given, as a 'fact' (*factum/Tatsache*). Any theory of subjectivity must be adjusted to accommodate this purported fact. The accommodation in this case—and Fichte seems to assume it to be the only one that will secure the desired effect—is to require the not-I to be another consciousness. This is because only a not-I that is an I, and thus is itself free, can condition the I in a way that is not inimical to freedom. If *ex hypothesi* the other I is not governed entirely by efficient-causal mechanism, then neither will its determining of the I be so governed. That is not all: the other I, in so determining the I as subject, determines it *as a self-determining subject*. Freedom is *self-determination* according to Fichte, and this is precisely how the other I determines the I as subject, i.e. in a way that enables and indeed advances its self-determination. Fichte construes this other-I *qua* a not-I as issuing a 'summons' (*Aufforderung*) to the I.¹⁷ In so determining itself, the I *qua* not-I is

¹⁷ *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, ed. E. Fuchs, 2nd rev. ed. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), pp. 176f. The summons is, in essence, a further specification of blocking at work in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Whether the specification is hinted at in the earlier work is a point of scholarly contention. For the answer: yes, see Alexis Philonenko, *La liberté humaine dans la philosophie de Fichte* (Paris: Vrin, 1966), p. 328; Eckart Förster, *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie* (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 2011), pp. 214–15 and nn. 5–6. For the answer: no, see Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 174–5 and n. 58.

relative to the I it determines; therefore, the I *qua* not-I is also determined by that I as an I relative to *it*. That is, Fichte holds that this structure of summoning is reciprocal and, given the constitutive dimension of subject-object relations in Fichte, reciprocally constitutive. In this relation between subject and object, each I recognizes (*anerkennt*) the other as that other in turn recognizes it. 'Recognize' here has a special meaning. It does not mean merely re-cognizing something previously cognized. Nor does it precisely mean becoming aware of a right to be treated as having a certain status, although that sense of the verb is closer to Fichte's intent. Rather, to recognize an I is to treat one's transcendental freedom as dependent on the like freedom of another. Jena romanticism inherits the claim that a structure of reciprocating intersubjectivity is basic to subjectivity, as do later idealists such as Hegel. The changes the romantics, and especially Schlegel, ring on the model are, however, quite different than those sought by Hegel. This constitutes a crucial difference between romantic and idealist social philosophy. We shall only be able to adequately survey this difference at the end of the second chapter, but we shall set out the romantic version of the reciprocity of the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of experience later in this chapter.

The second development in Fichte's views relevant to the romantic understanding and criticism of Fichte is much less discussed. Assume for the sake of discussion the correctness of Fichte's analysis of recognition as a basis for consciousness. That position calls for interaction on the part of subjects in order that consciousness correctly so-called obtain. How do subjects interact in such recognition? It is perhaps a bit speculative to suggest that Fichte picked up the answer from his Jena romantic cohorts who were at this time developing similar views, but his answer to the question is: linguistically. But there is an evident difficulty with this proposal. The posits and the summonses are supposed to be pre-discursive, and it is not clear how language could be pre-discursive. Fichte's attempt at a solution to the quandary appeals to the idea that imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) is a pre-discursive yet linguistic form of communication. One can be aware of such workings as such workings only by placing alongside them second-order reflection, and this perforce transforms a pre-discursive communicative base into a structure whose pre-discursive status is expressed by minimally discursive thought, thought that closely approximates being pre-discursive by admitting a great deal of indeterminacy in reference and description. That the activity of imagination might be pre-discursive in the required sense is a position Fichte again finds buried in Kant, specifically, in Kant's analysis of the schematic workings of the productive imagination in the first *Critique* and in his account of the free harmony of the faculties of the imagination and the understanding from the third. Fichte couples this to his own account of the reciprocity of

determination between the I and not-I, interpreting it now as the ‘impulse’ (*Impuls*) that provides a momentum through which both the subject and its object are determined as belonging to a system of relations of ‘oscillation’ (*Schweben*) between their determining and determined natures relative to one another.

In order to appreciate the full import of the idea, one must see it as the conclusion of a still longer chain of reasoning. The starting point of Fichte’s position is the claim that the I attempts to limit the not-I in order to enforce the absolute nature of its own impetus to limit, is not able to expunge the not-I (on penalty of expunging itself, given its reciprocal dependency) and is, to that extent, yet limited by the not-I. All the I can do is to *strive* to overcome the not-I’s basic limitation of it.¹⁸ This striving (*Streben*) is as a primordial matter indeterminate, but once reflection is on the scene, the striving changes character, becoming a sort of object, i.e. a more determinate ‘drive’ (*Trieb*).¹⁹ This drive has encoded in it both that (A) the I is at least minimally limited by the not-I and (B) that this striving to overcome the limitation and oscillating between determinacy and indeterminacy is basic to the I/not-I relation. Drives express the unbridled within the bridled. For Fichte ‘feeling’ is what allows drives to be articles of consciousness in a way that does not reduce the co-limitation of the I and the not-I to one of its constituents.²⁰ But embedded within any state (i.e. of feeling) is the propensity to transcend it because it is implicitly experienced at the same time as a not-I limitation on the I. That is, any state of the subject for Fichte is what Sartre calls ‘metastable’, containing within it a destabilizing tension.²¹ The subject registers this particular ‘lack’ (*Bedürfnis*)—restlessness seeking rest—as a ‘longing’ (*Sehnen*). Fichte analyzes the reemergence of manifolds of empirical consciousness in terms of this drive and longing. What is manifold in experience is so on account of the inherent activity of mind to traverse any given unity that is ulterior to the self. The self oscillates in the sense that the content of any manifold presents a problem for the absolute freedom of the posited I: its drive to consider the manifold as a *multiplicity* relative to thought and, yet, the necessity of its

¹⁸ GA I, 2: 397–8.

¹⁹ The ontology of drives is immensely important in nineteenth-century German language philosophy generally. The concept of a drive is central *inter alios* for Schiller, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Nietzsche (not to mention Freud). There are multiple points of transmission into the nineteenth-century context, e.g. Winckelmann, Lessing, Leibniz, Hamann, Herder, and even Kant. It is not possible to do credit to the topic here.

²⁰ GA I, 2: 414.

²¹ Sartre introduces this neologism in his analysis of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), but Robert Denoon Cumming is surely correct that it is a much broader structure. See *Starting Point: An Introduction to the Dialectic of Existence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 204.

having *one* content create an ineliminable tension in being an integrated subject. The sole way within reflection to express the striving for formal mastery over content is to alter states. The idea that subjectivity involves transgression of the epistemic or practical status quo is of immense importance to Jena romanticism. The romantics, and especially Schlegel, find the most important indicia of freedom in the power to reconfigure what is otherwise determinate by the very capacity to determine.

Imagination could hardly be more important to Fichte. It is a cardinal capacity by which the I is constituted in its imperfect reciprocity with the not-I, and in which this reciprocity registered in the I is at its fullest, most basic articulation. Fichte expands this structure in the *Foundations of Natural Right* in the way typical of that later work: for 'not-I' 'another-I' is substituted. This gives a greater sense of the importance to imagination for communication or communicability, but it is crucial to emphasize that the sense of 'communication' or 'communicability' here is non-standard. It is brought out best by the original German term '*Mitteilbarkeit*', which may be translated broadly by the unlovely 'sharability'. Again, the provenance for the concept is Kant.²² The point is that mutuality at this basic level does not require linguistic expression; it is sheer mutual influence in terms of freedom. The effect of this imaginative work at the sub-personal level is that the subject attempts to complete *per impossibile* the projection of itself in finite terms as unconditioned, where both the impetus to transcend limitation and the limitation itself are produced by the I.²³

The primary source for Novalis' views on Fichte is what are now known collectively as his *Fichte-Studien*, notebooks he filled in a little over the course of a year's time from 1795 to 1796.²⁴ What can seem especially inviting about these notes is that they express criticisms of Fichte in terms that do not entirely break with developing modes of argumentation in early idealism. This is not to say that the substance of Novalis' views is idealist; it is rather that Novalis attempts to develop points out of Fichte's own presentation of his thought in

²² AA 5: 217–19.

²³ One of the complicating features of Fichte's account of the pre-reflective conditions on consciousness is that he explicates the self-relation of the subject logically prior to consciousness in terms of the concept of intellectual intuition. Fichte deploys the idea of intellectual intuition in both his early Aenesidemus review and the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, bookending the treatment of positing in 1794. There has been no single use of Kantian terminology by Fichte that has caused so much misunderstanding of his position relative to Kant. By 'intellectual intuition' Fichte does *not* mean the same capacity that Kant credits to hypothetically non-discursive creatures that can have intellectual commerce with things-in-themselves. All that Fichte means to capture by the term 'intellectual intuition' is that the self-relation in positing is neither discursive nor sensory.

²⁴ The *Studien* were not published until 1901 and then only a selection of them. It was not until 1929 that Paul Kluckhohn edited and published a reasonably complete collection.

the 1794 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* by immanent argumentation and, thus, often in the vernacular of that very presentation. Novalis is thus still attracted by Fichte's foundationalism and universalism in ways that we shall argue Schlegel tries to resist. As a consequence, Schlegel's responses to idealism *qua* foundationalism are, when understood in the proper systematic context, crisper and more telling than Novalis'. What comes out in Schlegel, and less in Novalis, is a Jena romanticism driven by an idiosyncratic form of historically informed, non-naturalistic, hermeneutic pragmatism that, in the end, detaches rather more neatly than one might expect from the technicalities of Fichte's system. Polemic was Schlegel's natural intellectual modality, not *Mitgefühl*, and even if willfulness is not synonymous with autonomy, the former in some cases can contribute to the latter.

The Contributions and Limitations of Novalis' *Fichte-Studien*

Novalis was fascinated by Fichte's basic contention that Kant's analysis of subjectivity lags behind his analysis of objectivity and by the idea that deepening the former analysis best addresses the skeptical concerns that follow in the train of Kant's metaphysics of the supersensible—on the subject side, that of the spontaneity of thought and, on the object side, that of the thing-in-itself. Novalis did not, however, credit Fichte's solution to skeptical problems; he held that the sort of foundationalism on offer in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 was basically flawed and, moreover, seems to have held that *any* foundationalism would be likewise compromised.²⁵ His arguments for both conclusions express a partial retrenchment in Kant, not simply an extrapolation from Fichte as is sometimes thought. But it is a creative retrenchment, involving doctrines that Kant on principle would not have been able to embrace. One can best appreciate both the innovative nature of Novalis's critique of Fichte and the proximity

²⁵ The main anti-foundationalist figure present in Jena at the time of the emergence of romanticism was Immanuel Niethammer. See Frank, 'Unendliche Annäherung', pp. 507–10; and Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, pp. 64–6. The romantics, however, did not accept fully Niethammer's 'common sense' philosophy. See PhL I.ii, 25; KFSA 18: 20–1. Schlegel even tags him as a 'by the letter' Kantian; see KFSA 13: 27, a sure sign of deficiency. As Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert notes, Niethammer contrasts common sense with speculative uses of imagination, even as a means for avoiding such uses. See *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), pp. 113–14. This is evidently at odds with romantic practice. Such reservations notwithstanding, Niethammer was very important to the basic philosophical orientation of the Jena romantics due to his anti-systematic stance, a point that Ameriks particularly stresses.

of that critique to Fichtean modes of philosophical expression by closely focusing on Novalis' discussion of the relation of judgmental structure to self-consciousness.

A. Novalis on judgment—relative and absolute identity

Novalis understands the basic logical form of judgment in a manner that is entirely typical for his time, as consisting in the joining of a subject term (concept) with a predicate term (concept) by the copula 'is'—schematically, 'S is P'. The decisive question for much post-Kantian analysis of the structure of judgment is: what is the character of this 'is'?²⁶ The answer given to this question in post-Kantian thought, and the one that Novalis gives as well, is that predication is a species of identification and that predicative judgments covertly express identity statements. The impetus for this approach is the worry that, unless one analyzes the deep structure of predication in this fashion, the unity of the subject and the predicate in judgment is inexplicable. From the perspective of tolerably modern logic, where there is a rigid distinction between predication and identity, and thus between the 'is' of predication and that of identity, there does not seem to be much of a problem here: the 'is' of predication is not to be further explained, and certainly not in terms of the concept of identity. (This is reflected in the practice in modern standard first-order predicate logic of treating logical terms as standing for individuals and not for concepts.) Putting aside the question of whether this post-Kantian approach to the analysis of judgmental form is worthwhile in its own right, we may ask a more strictly historical question: what more precisely was the sought unity to which explicating predication in terms of identity was the solution? One way of reconstructing the purported requirement is bound to make it seem so clearly misguided that it would be hard to see how even a philosopher under the sway of the most ornate forms of German idealism or romanticism would be motivated to accept it. If the claim were that the two distinct properties attributed to a thing in a judgment are 'identical' just because they are two properties of *the same thing*, then the position

²⁶ It is mistaken to think of judgments as the only cognitions (*Erkenntnisse*) for Kant. Doing so betrays a contemporary bias towards propositions as primary constituents of thought. It is also wrong to think of cognitions in Kant as too closely aligned with beliefs. One often finds these two mistakes together, in large part due to the influence of Strawson's interpretation of Kant. Rather, a representation *qua* cognition for Kant is a human *capacity*. There is no circumventing the implications of Kant's faculty psychology here. The Kantian claim that one cannot know (i.e. cognize) things in themselves is a claim not about propositional thought or belief; it is, rather, a claim that finite discursive beings (i.e. like us) do not possess the right sort of intentionality. This is by no means a novel view of Kant: Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer, and Husserl were all well aware of making the relevant distinctions.

is hopeless, and ascription of it to Novalis should be avoided if possible out of interpretative charity. Take the judgment 'the madeleine is evocative'. If what is meant by the claim that predication is a species of identification is that being a madeleine is the same thing as being evocative (or even that being *this* madeleine is the same as being evocative in *this* way) the claim is plainly false. Novalis does not hold that predication presupposes identity between the *properties* corresponding to the concepts in the subject and predicate places in the judgment (or of the concepts themselves). The identity that tacitly underlies predication is, rather, the *self-sameness* of the *thing* to which both properties are ascribed. In the judgment 'the madeleine is evocative' two things are being said of one thing, that it is (1) a madeleine, and that it is (2) evocative. The one thing that is the madeleine is, *qua* being that thing, evocative. Judgments conjoin two property-concepts in the thought of the same thing; accordingly, judgments multiply represent the thing in question and express the identity of the thing in terms of different ways it is said to be.²⁷

Novalis calls this sort of identity expressed in judgments 'relative identity'.²⁸ It is 'relative' in two senses. First, the judgment expresses relative identity because the unity it represents between the subject and predicate is *relational*. Because a judgment expresses two ways of thinking about a thing as connected, it presupposes that the thing to which the subject and predicate concepts adhere is self-same: e.g. '*this (same) thing* that is a madeleine is *this (same) thing* that is evocative'.²⁹ Because the only way that finite discursive beings can think discretely is relational—i.e. by means of predicative judgments—the only way such subjects achieve any cognitive connection with things is by thinking of them as relative identities in this first sense. The second sense in which the identity expressed in judgment is 'relative' is intimately bound up with the first: identity in predication is 'relative' because it is *relative to* another species of identity that pertains to the absolute, 'absolute identity'. Here 'relative to' means something like 'dependent upon', and one can understand Novalis to be arguing that the identity expressed in the (reconstructed) surface logic of predication is consequent on and ontologically posterior to a deeper, non-predicative form of identity.³⁰

²⁷ Cf. William Empson's treatment of 'A is B' identities. See *The Structure of Complex Words* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 351–74.

²⁸ FS I.1, NS 2: 104–5; cf. FS I. 28, II.247, NS 2: 122–4, 186–7.

²⁹ Often Novalis puts the point in terms of the broader concept of synthesis ('broader' because, while all judgments are synthetic in the German idealist tradition, all synthesis need not be judgmental). See, for example, FS I.53–4, NS 2: 139–41.

³⁰ One is nowadays used to speaking of a distinction between two things: The grammar of a judgment or sentence-token and its deeper logical level (the proposition expressed by the judgment

Relative identity concerns the connection of two (or more) descriptions in one self-same thing. The self-sameness, as it were, is displayed both in terms of differentiation and connection. Absolute identity, by contrast, just *is* the self-sameness of a thing that must be presupposed in order for there to be judgment at all. Novalis in essence shares at least in spirit Hölderlin's fanciful view that the German word for 'judgment', *Urteil*, bears within its etymology the idea that there is a type of identity that logically precedes *any* differentiation or *any* characteristics of a thing—that there is a primordial division, or *Ur-teil*, that makes judgment possible in the first place.³¹ One need not be concerned by the etymological claim; it is almost certainly false. The philosophical point is that absolute identity is precisely not relational. It is the primitive unity of a thing by virtue of which its differential characteristics can inhere in it at all—what it is about a thing that makes its possible predicates the predicates of *it*. One can only represent this primitive unity at a conceptual remove, since all conceptual deployment must involve predicative judgment and, thus, must stop short at derivative, relative identity. Novalis recognizes that the point he is after is mercurial: the impoverished, indirect, and formal way given to judgment to model absolute identity by its very nature obscures absolute identity by cloaking it in relational terms. At the judgmental level absolute identity evaporates; it seems to carry no real information, but merely judgment in the form of logical identity: 'A is A'. But the concept of absolute identity is empty only if it is assessed

or sentence-token). This was Moore's and Russell's innovation. But the romantic analysis of judgment deploys a *tripartite* scheme: (A) surface grammaticality; (B) deep logical or predicative propositional structure (to be analyzed as relative identity); and (C) an even deeper structure of 'absolute identity', which (1) requires one to postulate a non-predicative structure for thought and thus something deeper than judgment, which (2) cannot be analyzed using standard logical tools.

³¹ StA IV: 216. Dieter Henrich has argued that Hölderlin's conception of *Urteil* is based in a conception of Being (*Seyn*) that is ontologically more basic than that of the absolute of the Jena romantics, the former comprising a primordial structure in which a non-differentiated unity obtains that comprises both subjective and non-subjective (i.e. natural as such) components, while the latter only pertains to primitive subjective experiences. Much of this way of viewing the relation of Hölderlin to the other romantics (as well as to the young Hegel) depends on a precise dating of the fragment *Urtheil und Seyn* (StA IV: 216–17). Henrich's dating of the manuscript has recently been challenged, with the result that the Schelling of *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie und Briefe über Kriticismus und Dogmatismus* (both 1795) comes crucially into play as an influence on Hölderlin. See Friedrich Strack, *Über Geist und Buchstabe in den frühen philosophischen Schriften Hölderlins* (Heidelberg: Manutius, 2013). The relevant effect of this for consideration of the Jena writers is that the connection with that particular phase of Schelling's thought introduces the possibility that Hölderlin's *Ur-teil* is something on the order of a regulative posit for subjective purposes, bringing him more in line with Novalis and Schlegel. For a suggestion, made without the benefit of changes in understanding of the primary sources, that such an interpretation of Hölderlin is plausible, see Fred Rush, 'Romanticism', in: *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. Forster and K. Gjesdal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 279–80.

in terms of a canon of content according to which relational thought is fundamental. Novalis holds that what seems on its face to be a bare tautology in fact reveals an essential limitation on the power of discursive thought to plumb the conditions of its own possibility. For, without the underlying unity of the thing that admits of representation and differentiation, so the argument goes, there would be no way to think, even at base perceptual levels, the aspects of the thing as separable, no way to compare them to arrive at concepts, and no way to experience them in synthesis.

B. Novalis' criticism of Fichte

With the distinction between relative and absolute identity in hand, one is in a position to join the outline of Novalis' account of the deep structure of judgment as the mental activity responsible for basic experience with Fichte's analysis of the preconditions for consciousness. Novalis agrees with Fichte that the subject must be in a more immediate relation with itself than that afforded by representation and that this more immediate relation must be unconscious; his reasoning to this conclusion tracks Fichte's own scrupulously. Novalis' main objection to Fichte's version of single-principle foundationalism does not have to do either with the logical structure Fichte ascribes to basic conscious awareness or with any problem of isomorphism or connection of representational states to their pre-representational grounds. The objection concerns, rather, the most abstract characteristic of Fichte's pre-representational and unconscious posits: that they involve *relations*.³² In Fichte's model of basic self-determination there is an internal unconscious articulation within the self of a more primitive relation between self and not-self, a relation constitutive of self and of self-awareness. What makes a self a self at all, what a self *is*, i.e. the triadic structure of positing, is internally complex. On the basis of what he takes to be the ironclad assumption that relations, and especially those of 'recognition', are discursive, Novalis argues

³² Novalis interprets Fichte, as many did at the time, to accord the doctrine of the posits metaphysical reality. If one takes Fichte instead to be arguing that one is required to have the *concept* of the posits, there is room for partial, but only partial, rapprochement between Novalis and Fichte. For, were one to interpret Fichte in this fashion, one could hold that the internal relations in the positing schema are artifacts of having to think reflectively about the ground for subjectivity—a position close to Novalis (and Schlegel). See subsection C of this section of this chapter. One might even go so far as Alexis Philonenko and assert that what Fichte is assuming in the posits is knowingly false, 'false' in the sense that the absolute I is used by Fichte to subvert itself (as, in essence, a ladder to throw away at the end of the exposition). This latter reading would introduce something like an ironic structure into Fichte's procedure. See *La liberté humaine*. Regardless of these possible concessions, Novalis would still claim that the reflective overlay must be 'corrected' to yield his own preferred restricted result. The routines for such correction are treated below. For Novalis they are romanticization and *ordo inversus*.

that this relational *articulation* within what is supposedly *immediate* impermissibly imports discursive structure into the unity of the foundation. Novalis contends that any structure of self-relation, or indeed any other relation, is an impermissible gloss on a foundation that must answer to strict conditions of absolute identity, or self-sameness. Manfred Frank has argued that the force of the objection is that the ideas 'immediate' and 'self-awareness' cannot belong together, at least not in the way Fichte's theory requires.³³ On this interpretation, one might express the objection in the form of a dilemma: *either* the awareness Fichte advocates as the basis for consciousness is immediate, in which case it cannot be a form of *self*-consciousness, *or* it is self-consciousness, in which case it must be *mediate*. This way of putting matters is not incorrect, but it does not capture adequately what is fundamentally at issue for Novalis. Fichte does not hold that the posits contain intentionality within their structure; his talk of pre-conscious 'awareness' is a mere *façon de parler*, a way of expressing sub-intentional relation by the only means available, which are discursive and therefore intentional. This sort of philosophical shorthand is already present in Kant, where transcendently necessary presuppositions are made intelligible (but not knowable) by projecting occurrent modes of experience onto them. No one experiences the transcendental unity of apperception *as such*, even if according to Kant the transcendental unity of apperception is necessary for the possibility of experience. (Indeed, this is a completely general property of transcendental philosophical reasoning, for better or worse). Novalis' arguments against Fichte are not directed toward questions of the general methodological probity of transcendental idealism, nor are they viewed with greatest perspicuity as responsive to allegedly bad philosophical psychology. Rather than an attack mounted against the general rubric of intellectual intuition that Frank's interpretation accentuates, the objection is grounded in an even more basic point having to do with the integrity of the internal structure of positing. Novalis' point is quite formal and strict. Any relation requires the connection of antecedently distinct items—in Fichte's case the internally complex articulation required for the agency of the absolutely self-positing I. The moral Novalis draws from his analysis of Fichte's position is that any thought that finite discursive creatures can have of the ultimate foundation of subjectivity must be constrained discursively, even though what it is supposed to be a thought *of* must be absolutely simple, i.e. it must be considered to be *strictly* indivisible and immediate. It follows that there can be no immediate awareness of the basis for subjectivity. *Expressing* the unity of the self relationally (i.e. in terms of the relation of the subject to itself) is

³³ 'Unendliche Annäherung', pp. 802–61.

unavoidable given that expression is conscious and, thus, involves judgmental relation. But one must take care not to import into one's understanding of the *ground for* expression the *conditions on* expression; one must keep in mind that, as close as expression can come to non-relational thought, it will never capture the simplicity of ground. To put the point in terms of Novalis' treatment of identity in judgment, a relation in which the *relata* are 'the same' (i.e. have relative identity) expresses this absolute identity in the only way possible for consciousness. But, for all that, such a judgment does not express absolute identity or true immediacy. From the perspective of thought, so to speak, what must be transcendently posited as its ground will have a Manichean aspect. But the ground so projected must be 'one'.

Novalis sometimes puts the point under consideration, somewhat misleadingly, in terms of a distinction between first-order and second-order reflection (*Reflexion*) in self-representation: but the point remains that one can only experience and express the unity from which the phenomenon of self-conscious subjectivity emerges in reflective terms.³⁴ The diversity of conscious experience is a result of that unity, a unity prior to all experience, a unity that itself cannot be experienced. To think otherwise is not merely a technical philosophical error; it is a standing tendency intrinsic to all thought concerning the ground for thought. Novalis attributes to reflective agents attempting to think foundational thoughts an analog of Kant's view that rational agents labor under the standing dialectical illusion that pure reason can have constitutive epistemic warrant.³⁵ The limitation that one cannot help but be self-conscious reflectively obscures the prospect for a philosophically clear rendition of its relation to its own ground of possibility. The reflective model, that is, distorts the ground of experience because the ground lies beyond that model's rightful bounds. To apply that model without a great deal of circumspection surreptitiously imports into the thought of absolute unity improper relational terms: 'we forsake *the identical* in order to present it' ('wir verlassen *das Identische* um es darzustellen').³⁶ In thinking about self-consciousness one is always at a remove from its ultimate source, from what Novalis calls 'the absolute' (*das Unbedingte*).³⁷ Yearning to press experience beyond its limits is constitutive of finite discursive beings, as Kant held it to be; it is an ineluctable aspect of being finite that one asks after final causes, especially

³⁴ FS I.16–17, NS 2: 114–16.

³⁵ See KrV A 60–4, 295ff./B84–8, 352ff.

³⁶ FS I.1, NS 2: 104 (emphasis in original).

³⁷ *Blütenstaub* 1, NS 2: 413 'Unbedingt' means 'unconditioned', but also more concretely it denotes what is not individuable, as all things (*Dinge*) must be. Novalis writes: 'we search everywhere for the Absolute, but always we find things' ('wir suchen überall das Unbedingte, und finden immer nur Dinge') *Blütenstaub* 1.

when the cause pertains to what is definitive, i.e. the effects of discursivity on being human. But, whenever one turns discursive thought back on itself to pose the issue and think the absolute, something is missing: the absolute. One is always already one thought too late, and the positing of intuitive experiential faculties is no help; rather, it is a hindrance.³⁸ The final word then seems to be that when subjects—finite discursive beings—as they must, reflect on the nature of the basic source for thought and on subjectivity itself, philosophical scruples dictate positing that source as, in important respects, being occult relative to reflection. Self-knowledge and being a self are not coextensive on this quasi-Kantian picture but, in the epistemic domain, they are extremely closely aligned. Discursive capacities can never properly yield knowledge of a substantial self, nor what is much the same, experience of a substantial self. Universal subjective structures bottom out in formal specifications of ‘I-thoughts’ that it must be possible to append reflectively to items of ones mental inventory if the inventory is to be counted so much as one’s own. Novalis agrees, it seems, and his critique of Fichte might be construed as an attempt to rehabilitate him back to a more abstemious Kantian root. At the outset of this chapter, we articulated two dimensions, ontological and an experiential, the relationship of which is under constant negotiation in Kantian and post-Kantian idealism. We stated that many thinkers following Kant—caught in what Imre Lakatos might have called the ‘research program’ of idealism—attempted to force together these dimensions. Against this background Novalis’s *Fichte-Studien* present a conceptual astringency that rivals and likely surpasses Kant’s own.

C. *Faith, feeling, and the ‘absolute’*

One might well at this juncture take what we have called Novalis’ astringency to issue in a simple, negative, faintly iconoclastic proscription against erecting false idols to the absolute. Such idols would be products of reflection or, what is coextensive in Novalis’ philosophy of mind, intentional objects. The absolute is sub-intentional; it is a category error to apply intentional means to understand it. Or, perhaps a slightly more forgiving picture is on offer, one that takes account of the inevitability of having to model the absolute reflectively and allows that intentional categories can come into play in characterizing the absolute, so long as one knows that what one is doing borders on attempting something that is strictly speaking impossible, i.e. to adequately render the absolute in finite terms. What circumspection reveals is that it is necessary for subjects to ask after the

³⁸ See FS I.16, NS 2: 114 where Novalis writes that intellectual intuition can display only *the limit* of reflection.

source of their subjectivity, at least necessary philosophically. But the rational products that result from any such inquiry cannot correspond to the absolute as such. We shall see that Schlegel embraces a very complex version of this picture.

Novalis, however, does not. More precisely, he does not rest with that picture. He forwards two candidates for the position of the most immediate subjective access to the absolute, candidates that tempt the impression that Novalis is trading in the idea that there is, contrary to his own stated views, immediate non-cognitive access to the absolute. The two candidates are: (1) 'feeling' (*Gefühl*), which he alternatively glosses as 'non-knowledge' (*Nicht-Wissen*)³⁹ and (2), more positively, 'faith' (*Glauben*).⁴⁰ Feeling corresponds to the conative dimension of the subject's most intimate experience as of the absolute, while 'faith' tracks the cognitive dimension of the same.⁴¹ We know from our discussion of Novalis' criticisms of Fichte that neither feeling nor faith could be modes of *self*-awareness, even of a preconscious sort, since such awareness would require the self to take itself at least minimally as an object and as standing in a relation, whereas the absolute is precisely not an object of any sort, nor is it a *relatum*.

As we shall see, Schlegel attempts to service the impulse to think beyond the bounds of discriminate thought by crafting a number of explicitly conceptual regimens that he takes to circumspectly express what it is to live riven between the demands of exhaustively constitutive discursive thought and the draw of the philosophically necessary idea of a completely unitary source for such thought.⁴² Novalis also experiments with such circumspection in his doctrine of the *ordo inversus*, which we shall turn to later. The feeling/faith binary is not a mode of circumspection; instead, is the postulation of a non-discursive immediacy with the absolute, understood here as always with Jena romanticism as the source for subjective spontaneity. Novalis must deny at all costs that anything like an experience *as of* the absolute eventuates from such a connection; otherwise he falls

³⁹ FS I.15–22, 32–43, NS 2: 113–20, 126–33. The term has a Kantian provenance. See KrV B22.

⁴⁰ See FS I.15–17, 19–22, NS 2: 113–15, 115–20. ⁴¹ FS I.15, NS 2: 113.

⁴² Adrian Moore writes that 'we cannot represent limits to what we represent. For if we cannot represent anything beyond those limits, then we cannot represent our not being able to represent anything beyond those limits. [...] [T]he very idea of that which is transcendent is incoherent.' A. W. Moore, *Points of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 119. We shall see that Hegel deploys something like this charge against the romantics, as does Jacobi (and Moore) against Kant. (Moore does not consider Novalis or Schlegel.) This is a potentially devastating charge against transcendental philosophy generally. Here I can only preview what I hope to work out more fully in chapter two, when we turn to Hegel's multifaceted critique of romanticism in earnest. Much depends on the meaning of 'represent' in the charge; any rescue of Jena romanticism from the objection will have to argue that the imaginative routines meant to express the absolute are not 'representational' in an objectionable sense of the term. Put alternatively, much depends on liberating the romantics from standard-issue, idealist transcendental metaphysics.

into a snare similar to that which he accuses Fichte of tripping. Such immediacy then, could never be 'foundational' in any sense relevant to the systematic philosophy of the day, for there is no possible experience with content, i.e. no structured experience. Because Novalis holds that all experience worth the name is structured, that means that there could be no experience as of the absolute. Other philosophers who have been drawn to the idea that there is an 'absolute' of this character relative to human experience—e.g. Hölderlin, late Schelling, Heidegger—struggle with emptying discursive constraints out of the idea of this sort of immediacy. The typical move is to postulate a mode of pure openness to the absolute that has no further uptake that does not distort the openness. To be avoided are not only explicitly problematic constructs like concepts, but also notions like 'access to', 'experience of', and 'relation to'. What is sought is an idea of subjective readiness to be affected to which very few, if any, predicates could attach. This is what Novalis attempts to provide.

Novalis' adoption of *Glaube* is a nod to Jacobi, but it is crucial to note that his understanding of faith is significantly different from Jacobi's.⁴³ Jacobi conceives of faith as unstructured, yet *rational* openness to the world. It is a form of *insight*. Jacobi, accordingly, interprets faith as a naïve realist might interpret primitive belief. Understood in this way faith might deliver basic knowledge, and indeed that is its philosophical function in Jacobi's epistemology. For Novalis, by contrast, faith is openness along a quasi-cognitive dimension, one that takes it as given that discrete cognition be provisioned thoughts. It is, in essence a faintly secularized form of grace; finite subjects cannot represent or otherwise experience the absolute *qua* absolute, yet even that very limitation is a gift, as is that there is anything to think at all. Such existence is then an 'establishing gift' (*Stiftung*): it establishes the very possibility of thinking. Turning from faith to the even more potentially problematic category 'feeling', it is important to give a likewise modest interpretation of Novalis' position. Feeling is often treated philosophically either as a deficient mode of cognition or a result of the operation of such a mode (e.g. Kant treats feelings as a species of representation through which nothing more

⁴³ At first both Novalis and Schlegel were positively impressed with Jacobi, but they quickly distanced themselves from him and, finally, became fiercely dismissive of several of his central ideas. Thus Schlegel pointedly denies Jacobi's *salto mortale* as 'uncritical' (KFSa 2: 74) and even insincere: '[i]n their [Jacobi's followers] –FR] thoughts they take a frightfully long approach run and then pat themselves on the back for having braved the danger' (AFr 346, KFSa 2: 226–7). The idea of a leap is also unable to capture the essential human attribute of *striving* after truth central to Novalis' and Schlegel's thought (PhL II.ii, 459, KFSa 18: 358; PhL I.ii, 361, 371, KFSa 18: 55, 56). Schlegel also tends to foreground the dependency of Jacobi on Kant as a point of reaction. See PhL I.i, 34, KFSa 17: 21: 'Wenn die Königsberger Post umwirft, so sitzt Jacobi auf dem Trocken'.

discriminate can be represented) or as brute sensate responsiveness (e.g. Hume). Feeling, like faith, is a posit, one with merely regulative force. Feeling is the conative surrogate of faith. Faith is sheer openness to the absolute's provision of thought, maximal pure openness to the absolute, viewed from the side of the discrete subject and what it is that makes her discrete—her thoughts. Feeling is the same openness, this time regarded as intimacy or closeness to the absolute verging on de-individualization. It is immersive, having to do with the closest a discrete subject can come to merging with its source in what is radically non-discrete. Strictly speaking—and this is the only way of speaking about this primordial feeling according to Novalis—feeling is not a feeling of the absolute, i.e. a feeling that would either take an object or that would exhibit in its structure a qualitative origin in the absolute. Feeling is not ingress into the absolute; it is, rather, a bearing of discrete subjects toward the absolute. Accordingly, when Novalis writes that 'feeling cannot feel itself', one of the things he is emphasizing is that feeling does not have the reflexive character of reflection,⁴⁴ but it is crucial to keep in mind that this does not mean that feeling (or faith) is a form of ultimate spontaneity. Feeling always expresses limitation in relation to spontaneity; more specifically, it is a limitation that makes patent the lack of *pure* spontaneity (one *needs* provision of the possibility of thought). In the case of feeling the limitation on spontaneity is felt as a rebound effect or, perhaps, an echo of something finite being denied access to the infinite. It is, that is, close to what Fichte calls a check, again with the proviso that one cannot specify the structure from which the check arises philosophically. When primordial feeling crests to consciousness, then, it does so already replete with loss, or better, as a combination of loss and the exaltation of striving for unfettered (and therefore non-human) spontaneity. Novalis is, accordingly, Fichtean to the extent that he substitutes Fichte's view that the matter of intuition is itself a product of subjectivity for Kant's account of passive sensation. But Novalis denies any theoretical role for feeling as a capacity to directly access the absolute; there is no experience of feeling without minimal individuation of feeling.

There is one final chapter in Novalis' account of feeling. From the passivity of feeling, he concludes that the absolute is active. He seems to take this to be an inference whose soundness is quite easy to demonstrate. One can reconstruct the demonstration as follows. If a thing is wholly passive it will not be active in any way, including the activity necessary to bring itself into being. Wholly passive things require active and external causes. Feeling is such a wholly passive thing by

⁴⁴ FS I.15, NS 2: 114.

hypothesis, thus it must be brought into being by something else. That something else is the absolute, a premise whose truth is established, if it is established, in virtue of Novalis' ontology. Since the absolute, as the ground of all elements of finite subjectivity, must *bring about* that passive receptivity, it must be active to that extent at least, even if that activity is not rendered as such within the passive receptivity.⁴⁵

These reflections on the status of faith and primordial feeling in Novalis' account comport with Novalis' statement that philosophy can merely indicate the 'limits' or 'borders' (*Grenzen*) of reflection by means of a feeling arising out of our inability to advance beyond those borders.⁴⁶ 'Faith' and 'feeling' together establish the furthest point philosophy can advance in its attempt to model the absolute. This feeling of not being able to advance further is one of dissolution, of lack or deficiency (*Mangel*), that manifests when one contrasts the fullness (*die Fülle*) and self-enclosure of the absolute as a source for all subjectivity with the proper access to the absolute that each subject can have. Again, the state is bifurcated, with reciprocity between its elements. This lack, which is a fundamental and constitutive feeling for the subject given the constitutive role of the absolute in subjectivity, tokens an absence necessarily inserted in the subject in virtue of her being a subject at all. From this one might think that feeling is wholly negative in character *κατ' ἐξοχήν*. But the lack is also productive; the fullness of the absolute is not articulated, and the only way for subjects to attempt to complete themselves as conditioned beings is by modeling that fullness in the ways available to them—i.e. by the synthetic process of building up experience and knowledge toward 'totality' (*ein Ganz*). The absolute as it is expressed in primordial feeling and faith initiates this process. Regardless of the importance of the concepts of primordial feeling and faith for Novalis, his final view is that it is the ongoing process of conceptual articulation that best amplifies the relation of the absolute to finite subjectivity. Feeling and faith are not replacements for this process.

Novalis holds that these sorts of rather general and abstract claims about the absolute and finite subjects' prospects for feeling and thinking about it are as far as philosophy can go. And philosophy can go this far only by following a rigorous analysis of the conditions required for the possibility of consciousness—which are, in turn, the conditions of the possibility of philosophy itself. The rest, Novalis holds, is left to *art*, and to the art of poetry in particular. This is where Friedrich Schlegel enters the story in full.

⁴⁵ FS I.15, 17, NS 2: 113, 115.

⁴⁶ See FS I.16, NS 2: 114.

Schlegel's Insight

One of the signal contributions of Jena romanticism is to offer an account of *what it is like* to be an agent that is focally oriented in terms of her subjectivity, where experience of the absence of the foundation of her subjectivity is central to that orientation. With Schlegel's Jena writings the romantics' concern with the lived impacts of their theory of the absolute comes into its own, that is, their concern with the existential or phenomenological deliverances of the theory. This dimension of Jena romanticism is one that I shall cite in support of my contention that Schlegel's treatment of such impacts is in many ways an advance on Novalis'—a claim as I have said that runs counter to received opinion. Novalis does not wholly neglect the issue of the lived character of romanticism, and I discuss below his doctrines of 'romanticization' (*Romantizierung*) and *ordo inversus*, as well as some pertinent literary techniques from his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.⁴⁷ My challenge to the standard view that Novalis is philosophically primary among the romantics is based on the premise that the most important philosophical aspect of romanticism is its inventory of practices for life under the conditions of the absence from experience of the absolute. Schlegel in my view has much more interesting views on this matter than Novalis, better worked out and developed (to their advantage) in consort with his revolutionary emphasis on the philosophy of language, historical linguistics, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of history.

Viewed in terms of the distinction current in the 1790s between following the 'letter' versus the 'spirit' of Kant's thought, Schlegel clearly counts as a spiritual Kantian.⁴⁸ His impatience with what he considered rigid Kantianism is well documented. One basic charge is a Kantian one, directed ironically at Kantians: that slavish Kantianism is 'uncritical' and heteronomous. Obsession with fidelity to Kant's systematic philosophical expression backfires, undermining what is substantively promising in the critical philosophy: "The orthodox Kantians seek the principle of their philosophy in Kant in vain. It is in Bürger's

⁴⁷ See the Appendix for an extended interpretation of the philosophical expression of these ideas in *Heinrich*.

⁴⁸ Fichte's uses of the distinction between the letter and spirit of Kant's philosophy are too numerous to cite. On Fichte's understanding of the distinction more generally, see GA I, 6: 333–61; see also GA II, 3: 345–53. The distinction between letter and spirit of course is biblical in origin. Paul contrasts the new covenant with the juridical letter of Jewish law in these terms. See 2 Cor. 3: 5–6. Key to the contrast for Paul is that law acts as a juridical intermediary in the experience of God, which intermediary is no longer necessary, having been set aside for a more direct and personal communication with the divine. This charts well Hegel's understanding of Fichte's superiority to Kant, discussed in chapter two.

poems and reads: The word of the emperor should not be twisted and turned.⁴⁹ The point redounds on Kant under an aspect of a by-the-book Kantian in a *bon mot* concerning strict Kantian ethics: 'The Kantians' conception of duty relates to the command of honor, the voice of calling and God, which are within us in the way that the dried flower relates to the fresh flower on a living stem.'⁵⁰ For Schlegel, then, to be a literal Kantian is to be no Kantian at all; instead, what is properly Kantian and worth pursuing philosophically is an as-yet-to-be-worked-out *impetus*, a mode of philosophical animation, not a stable system of thought. Schlegel even goes so far as to suggest that the critical philosophy would have come into being in Germany without Kant at all (but also that it is 'best' that Kant did in fact initiate it).⁵¹ Of course 'the spirit' is as slippery as 'the letter' is staid, and Schlegel's Kantian credentials are hardly to be taken for granted on the basis of his own testimony.

Understanding Schlegel's development of the existential impacts of the Jena doctrine of the absolute will take one to the center of his most important doctrines: (1) irony; (2) reciprocal proof (*Wechselerweis*); and (3) global regulative reason and its relation to imagination.⁵² Roughly speaking, Schlegel's main concern is to conceptualize a form of experience and communication in which the recognition by finite subjects of the slippage between the source for their subjectivity in the absolute, on the one hand, and their discursive activity in the

⁴⁹ AFr 298, KFSA 2: 215. In a similar vein, Schlegel writes that '[t]he tacit assumption and the first postulate of all the harmonics of the Kantian evangelists is: Kant's philosophy must be consistent with itself' (AFr 107, KFSA 2: 181). The by-the-book Kantians are also described as 'regressive hyper-critics' who 'hang Kant about their necks like an amulet of truth' (PhL I.ii, 1, 4, KFSA 18: 19, 20).

⁵⁰ I 39, KFSA 2: 259; cf. AFr 21, KFSA 2: 168: 'The Kantian philosophy resembles the forged letter that Maria puts in Malvolio's way in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, with the only difference being that there are countless Malvolios (*male volo*) [*sic*] in Germany who tie their garters crossways, wear yellow stockings, and smile madly and incessantly'. See also AFr 41, 47, 104, KFSA 2: 171, 172, 180. As was typical of the time, it was Kant's moral philosophy that first attracted Schlegel's sustained study, but from the outset Schlegel found it 'formalistic' and 'juridical' and the attempt to ground morality in a universal law of reason implausible (KFSA 12: 48). When his attention turns shortly thereafter to the first *Critique*, he is more impressed, but still thinks that Kant is merely an 'introduction to philosophy' (KFSA 12: 286). In a way, Kant might have agreed.

⁵¹ AFr 387, KFSA 2: 237.

⁵² One might also argue for inclusion of 'wit' (*Witz*), a term with a long and quite interesting history in German philosophy and art criticism from the generation prior to Kant, through Kant, and into the romantic period. See Haym, *Die Romantische Schule*, pp. 262–3. There are many uses of this term, both romantic and pre-romantic. It plays an important role in Kant's account of the structure of judgment and concept formation. The basic idea is that the capacity to both form concepts and judgments must bottom out in a nearly non-comparative act of sheer juxtaposition. Often this is presented as intuitive—as just knowing, without antecedent express consideration, what belongs together and yet allows room for thought-improvisation. Voltaire is often taken to be exemplary.

world, on the other, is most prominent. His strategy is to do so by deploying several ways to model the phenomenon of *conceptual evasion*. (Schlegel is not, as a general matter, as attracted by thinking of the experiential correlate of the absolute as something approaching an immediacy as is Novalis.) Conceptual evasion is a thoroughly mediated procedure or discipline for Schlegel in which, no matter how one attempts to arrive at a comprehensive conception of a uniquely founded mode of life that would answer to the absolute, it turns out that the univocal nature of the conception in question and its purported determinate status can be placed in question. The sense of ‘placed in question’ here is important to mark, for it is not merely academic. It involves deploying the full resources of the imagination to project ‘from the inside out’, as it were, alternate possibly comprehensive forms of life, all while one is in the thick of actual life. Schlegel in this fashion subtly shifts away from Novalis’ formulation of the problem of philosophical purchase on the absolute, on which the absolute evades *all* understanding, toward a formulation on which it evades *any particular* understanding.

How, more specifically, might one begin to model this evasion? Schlegel’s family of doctrines—irony, reciprocal proof, and global regulative reason—converge as different ways to think of how conceptual aggregation and modulation can ‘indicate’ (*andeuten*) the absolute as a present absence in experience. If one has the impression at this point of a Hegelian resonance, that is entirely proper; but, as I argue in chapter two, it is a resonance that emanates from Schlegel to Hegel (not the other way around), and Schlegel has in many ways the more philosophically interesting account of the relation of conceptual ‘movement’ to individual and social self-awareness. It is important at the outset to keep in mind that what Schlegel offers is not an abstract, bland, and merely logical *cum* metaphysical apparatus according to which any one conceptual scheme or ‘world’ only has internal stability if contrasted with other schemes at variance with it. Schlegel intends his models to have a much stronger experiential aspect, where what it is to ‘consider’ such a scheme in the relevant sense involves imaginative projection into it, so that it may be experienced in the richness of its difference from (and perhaps similarity to) what is actual for one.

A. *Reciprocal proof and romantic ‘progression’*

Schlegel’s most formal device—the one aspect of his philosophy that has something of the character of an abstract principle about the foundations of consciousness in a form of self-consciousness—is his doctrine of ‘reciprocal principle’ or ‘proof’ (*Wechselerweis/-beweis*). Like Schlegel’s views on the nature and extent of regulative reason discussed in the next section, the doctrine of

reciprocal proof is a crucial aspect of his thought that is downplayed in many discussions of romanticism that take their cue from literary theory. There the sole emphasis is often placed on Schlegel's theory of irony, which cannot be understood fully without holding in view the account of reciprocal proof. Philosophical studies of Schlegel have not ignored altogether reciprocal proof; nevertheless, there is a tendency in those treatments that do discuss the doctrine to over-emphasize its proximity to Fichte's conception of intellectual intuition. This approach renders Schlegel at least in part as a theorist for whom immediate access to the absolute is possible. Not only is that precisely not Schlegel's view—in fact, it is the one he is most at pains to attack—but it introduces into the conspectus of his overall view a tension with his account of irony that threatens incoherency. I lay stress instead on how a correct understanding of reciprocal proof reveals Schlegel's great distance from Fichte, appearances to the contrary. This approach is then carried forward to show better the systematic nature of Schlegel's thought by tightening the relation between reciprocal proof and Schlegel's account of regulative reason and irony.

Schlegel introduces the term 'reciprocal proof' in his 1796 review of Jacobi's *Woldemar*, but leaves the concept undeveloped there.⁵³ Schlegel expands his account of reciprocal proof incrementally from late 1796 through 1801, after an initial and brief six-month period of enthusiasm for Fichte's brand of single-principle foundationalism.⁵⁴ This development can best be charted through notes Schlegel compiles over the course of 1797–8, which he calls, in imitation of Goethe, his *Philosophische Lehrjahre*; in the absence of this material one might assume that the doctrine emerges in an articulated form only in the *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy* of 1800–1, where indeed the proof (here Schlegel shifts to calling it a 'principle' [*Grundsatz*]) is the point of departure.

Schlegel's basic developmental strategy is to isolate what he takes to be the expressive potential of Fichte's reciprocal positing schema from its improper statement as a foundational principle. Like Novalis, Schlegel finds the letter of Fichte's statement to be inappropriately discursive and thus incoherent as a characterization of the absolute. Moreover, Schlegel concurs with Novalis—Novalis' *Fichte-Studien* develop at the same time that he carries on extensive correspondence with Schlegel concerning Fichte—that no possible restatement of the posits could be properly foundational, for the entirely general reason that any statement of the nature of the absolute that does not have built into it the

⁵³ KFSa 2: 72.

⁵⁴ See Guido Naschert, *Friedrich Schlegels philosophische Lehrjahre. Untersuchungen zu den Traditionsbezügen und Innovationen der Frühromantik* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

conditions of discursive distance that romanticism requires is a failure. And that means, in turn, that there can be no system of philosophy, no '*Wissenschaftslehre*' as Fichte conceives it. So, in essence, Schlegel wants to take the then-commonplace distinction between the 'letter' and the 'spirit' of a philosopher's thought, first deployed by Fichte to describe the relation between Kant and Kantianism, and deploy it in the case of Fichte himself. This is a characteristically cheeky, slightly insubordinate bit of philosophical wit on Schlegel's part, but it is quite productive for him.

It is paramount to understand the idiosyncratic conception of proof with which Schlegel operates. It is precisely *not* the idea of a proof procedure that typifies most philosophy, be that deduction, induction, or any other related form (abduction, inference to best explanation, etc.). Schlegel means by 'proof', first, a form of human agency and experience and not a mere intellectual structure or procedure. Therefore, second, the 'proof' does not aim at a conclusion to complete it; it is rather the initiation of an infinite chain of reasoning and experience, one through which one will prove oneself to oneself. This sense of 'prove' is present in English, as for instance when one says 'she proved herself a good friend' or when one refers to a test as a 'proving ground'. The German '*erweisen*' in some of its antiquated uses (uses that would have been antiquated by Schlegel's time as well) can have a softer sense of demonstration than 'proof' denotes, allowing for a performative sense of 'making a show of something' or 'proffering', which is closer to Schlegel's intent in using the term. A 'proof' in this sense reflects an act of consciousness on the part of the subject *at each step*—i.e. at each point of conceptual transition—and conveys that the consciousness in question is directed towards experiencing the presence of the point of departure of the proof (i.e. its 'premise', although Schlegel does not call it that) as it is present *at that step*, as it has been reformed by the advance of the proof to that point. This is a recognizably dialectical sense of proof, as is appropriate given its inspiration in Fichte's reciprocal positing scheme. But there is a crucial difference in Schlegel's conception, one that is quite important for, but wholly unacknowledged by, Hegel (who likely attended at least some of Schlegel's 1800–1 lecture).

Specifically, Schlegel writes that the two aspects of the 'ultimate ground' (*der letzte Grund*) of his system are: (1) the proposition (*Satz*) 'the I posits itself' and (2) the proposition 'the I should/is said to [*soll*] posit itself'.⁵⁵ Schlegel charges

⁵⁵ PhL Beilage II, 22, KFSa 18: 520. Here Schlegel speaks not of reciprocal proof but of a 'reciprocal foundational principle'. This does not seem a significant difference to me and may be explained by Schlegel's close analysis of Fichte, who does speak of principles. In what follows, I treat these formulations as equivalent. In fact, I favor the terminology of 'reciprocal proof' because of the greater sense it gives of the process of reciprocation that I take to be indispensable for Schlegel.

that Fichte's foundational principle—that the I posits itself absolutely—reduces these two principles to one, specifically to the first. This is tantamount to contending that Fichte's reduction violates the desideratum that the absolute is not subject to discursive specification, because the first principle only has the meaning Schlegel intends as it is conditioned by and in turn conditions the second principle.⁵⁶ That is, reciprocal proof involves two grounding principles rather than one—it posits a *dyadic* form of grounding and, when one turns to the second principle, one finds that the way in which the proof operates to ground a system is so far from idealist deductive procedures that the sense of 'foundation' must be made to shift radically.⁵⁷

The key to understanding Schlegel's formulation of the structure of reciprocal proof, therefore, lies in understanding the way the second principle, or second aspect of the proof structure, conditions the first. The key to that, in turn, resides in the specification Schlegel introduces by the use of the word '*soll*'. The word can function in the statement in two distinct but compatible ways. First, the verb 'sollen', when used objectively, expresses obligation. This would indicate that the second aspect of the proof structure differs from the first in broadly ethical terms; the first aspect states that the I posits itself and the second that it should do so. But, second, one can also use modal verbs with subjective meaning, in order to register degrees of certitude on the part of the speaker about a state of affairs. That is, subjective uses of modal terms are conjectural. In the case of the present indicative in German, it is not possible to tell from the syntax whether the objective or subjective meaning is intended. Specifically, 'sollen' when used subjectively indicates a neutral report of something that the speaker has not experienced at first hand, a supposition, the truth of which is neither disputed nor endorsed. Accordingly, the second aspect differs from the first by qualifying it epistemically: it is 'said that' or 'supposed to be the case that' the I posits itself. In what follows, we argue that both meanings of 'sollen' are present and that, if they were not, one would not be in a position to take the full measure of the proof structure. This becomes apparent in the 'official' presentation of the reciprocal proof in the *Lectures*. At the outset of the *Lectures* Schlegel establishes a taxonomy based in a distinction he presses between two ways to consider

⁵⁶ See PhL Beilage I, 64–71, KFSa 18, 511–12.

⁵⁷ One might be concerned here that the concept of grounding would offend the anti-foundationalist stance of Jena romanticism. It need not do so: 'grounding' as Schlegel uses the concept here, and as will become clear in the following exegesis, refers to an activity of finite subjects in which they acknowledge their dependence on something that is conceptually unavailable to them. As such grounding will always incorporate an element of distance from the absolute that would block foundationalism. As always, what the Jena philosophers attempt to do is to credit the urge to seek foundations without crediting the claimed result towards which the urge is directed.

philosophical foundations. The first has to do with where one must begin in the activity of philosophy—whence one begins to philosophize. This beginning point, he states, is not to be regarded as an ontological ground from which the very possibility of subjectivity springs; rather, it is but the first experiential point in an infinite series of such points that stem from it. Its being first is relative to the chain it begins and, in that sense, it is not a proper ground, at least not the sort of ground a foundationalist like Fichte would require.⁵⁸ Schlegel holds, then, that such a beginning is only a single point of departure among many possible others. Additionally, what it begins, i.e. the series, also is made up of like single points. Earlier points in the chain condition later ones, and the first conditions them all. But even it is not unconditioned; it is ultimately contingent. Thus, it cannot be considered the absolute, which is a totality within pure singularity, unconditioned and outside experience. Schlegel calls this ground for philosophizing a ‘principle’ (*Princip*) and claims that it can be known. But this knowledge is only of where one began, not the beginning of all. In contrast to such a ‘principle’, Schlegel calls the second basic component of the reciprocal proof an ‘idea’ (*Idee*).⁵⁹ He surely means to borrow the terminology from Kant and does so in order to underline the purely speculative status of this second element. It is akin to Fichte’s positing schema, the content of which provides a real ontological grounding for ‘science’. But Schlegel, unlike Fichte, asserts this component of proof *problematically*; like a Kantian idea, a concept for which no intuition can be provided and for which that lack of provision is an impetus for speculation about ultimate matters, Schlegel is claiming that the idea of an ontological ground for subjectivity is properly merely of regulative use. To use it constitutively, as he takes Fichte to do, is to indulge the sort of cognitive overreaching that Schlegel takes to be endemic in Fichte’s position. Reciprocal proof seen under the aspect of providing a ‘principle’ is subject to both senses of ‘soll’: one *should* answer the vocation of one’s discursive subjectivity and pursue in the most vigorous way the constructive activity of subjects relative to the world that Schlegel as a Kantian (and now a Fichtean) ‘of the spirit’ takes to be definitive of subjects. And, in so doing, one *supposes* as provisional a point of embarkation for such a task, which provides an initial, if later shifted, point of orientation. This provisional status does not entail skepticism; it is supposition without assessment of probability. As such it evinces less commitment than that of a presupposition in the context of argument. But all that is required in the context of reciprocal proof is that the posit is taken for granted for present purposes, and that would seem to cohere with the epistemic weight the verb assigns.

⁵⁸ KFSa 12: 3–4.

⁵⁹ KFSa 12: 3–4; see also AFr 121, KFSa 2: 184.

This qualification on the starting point as provisional is crucial; any candidate starting point sits against the background of a felt insufficiency relative to the absolute—a feeling of lack.⁶⁰ Idea and principle reciprocally relate in that the posited idea establishes as a speculative matter how one must view the absolute, given that one cannot experience it: as a totality complete in itself. One might call this the *intensive* dimension of the reciprocal proof structure. The principle directs one to pursue in life as best as one can the finite discursive correlate to that completeness. That correlate itself would be ‘infinite’ in that it would be by definition a project that cannot be completed. The best finite discursive beings can do to ‘approximate’ (*annähern*) the absolute is to create a plenitude of different structures that find their roots in the absolute—i.e. constant constructive activity.

⁶⁰ Manfred Frank treats ‘feeling’ for Schlegel as on a par with Novalis’ analysis of it. I believe I disagree both with the way Frank construes ‘feeling’ in Novalis and with the proposition that Schlegel has a similar treatment. Frank seems to hold that feeling for Novalis is a primitive state of selfsame relation that is not properly a state of the subject (because subjective states require reflective purchase) but one that underlies subjectivity in all subjects. This view, that the feeling in question is entirely antecedent to reflection and is not merely posited as such or a feeling consequent on a certain reflection on the absolute as posited, runs contrary to the account I have given of feeling in Novalis. On my interpretation feeling is a product of a constitutive tension between two components, an ineluctable desire to reach back to one’s roots in the absolute and an implacable inability to do so. This is the sense of ‘lack’ involved—the lack is the content of the feeling supplied by thought—i.e. an uneasy coexistence between disquiet and composure. Frank also thinks Schlegel indulges in this idea of a feeling of ‘self-confidence’ (*Selbstvertrauen*). See *Auswege*, p. 102. I hope that I have made clear, and that it will become clearer still in subsections B and D of this section of this chapter, that it is in my estimation incorrect to ascribe to Schlegel the view that feeling provides a sense of *bei-sich-selbst-zu Hause-sein*, unless that just means to be tasked with the infinite project of world- and self-construction that Schlegel holds definitive of subjectivity. Again, the feeling in question is a result of a reflective procedure; it does not lie at its base. Finally, even though my interpretation ascribes to both Novalis and Schlegel the position that the feeling of the absolute arises out of reflection on its status relative to subjects, I wish to resist the further idea that the reflective processes are the same for them. What misleads Frank here, I believe, is a real general cast of Novalis’ thought to which I have alluded before—i.e. he can seem to court immediacy more than does Schlegel, and of course feeling is a category of immediacy par excellence. Again, I judge Schlegel’s more explicitly reflective and mediate account superior.

It may be that Frank is tempted to find in Schlegel a romantic form of *Selbstvertrauen* due to Dieter Henrich’s use of the concept. See Henrich, ‘Über Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterhaltung’, in *Selbstverhältnisse* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), pp. 109–30; see also ‘Grund und Gang spekulativen Denkens’, in *Metaphysik nach Kant?*, ed. D. Henrich and R.-P. Horstmann (Klett-Cotta, 1988), pp. 83–120. For Henrich, *Selbstvertrauen* is a pre-reflective form of being that is further (reflectively) expressed in *Selbstbewußtsein*. The latter term is often translated into English by the term ‘self-consciousness’. This is not incorrect at all, but that term, as it is standardly deployed in philosophy, refers to an abstract or even formal state of being aware of oneself. But the term can also refer in German to confidence in oneself. (The English terms into which the German is translated can also yield this meaning.) This idea of a primary, implicit pre-reflective structure mapping onto a secondary, more express structure of the same in Henrich’s thought has a Hegelianized Hölderlin as its historical inspiration. This is a typical result of the so-called ‘Heidelberg School’ treatment of these issues and historical figures. I would argue that the Hegelian element makes quite problematic any straightforward relevance for Jena romanticism.

'Completeness' can only be striven for under conditions of subjectivity by systematic, accumulative means. One might call this the *extensive* dimension of the proof structure.

In perhaps the single most famous statement of early German romanticism, *Athenäum Fragment* 116, Schlegel writes that '[r]omantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry'.⁶¹ We shall discuss below the terms 'poetry' and 'universal' as they figure in this passage; but it is possible to develop ahead of time the sense in which Schlegel's views treat cognitive construction of the world as 'progressive'. In doing so, it is very important not to assume a particular view on what cognitive progress is and impose it on Schlegel. The alien view that I have in mind here is a common idea: progress is conceived in terms of closing the distance to an end point. A child can be said to progress towards being able to ride a bicycle if she gets closer to that end by mastering certain skills along the way, e.g. balancing while pedaling, not looking down while riding ahead, etc. To call her ongoing activities 'progress' is to judge them relative to that end point. The end point in question might be one that can be realized (e.g. riding a bicycle), or it might be posited as unreachable and ideal (e.g. becoming a perfect basketball player). Ideas, or in more technically correct terminology 'ideals', in Kant correspond to such end points, but they only stand for ideal ends that cannot be realized in full—they may only be asymptotically approximated.⁶² Schlegel's conception of progress does not require progression to be judged in terms of approximation to ends and, in fact, forbids it. Under the conditions of action according to reciprocal proof, a subject's progress is not how much she contributes to converging on truth, knowledge, etc.; rather, progression is charted in terms of the undisposed impetus provided by an initial orientation reflecting the present absence of the absolute in experience. One progresses in this sense by retaining one's cognitive animation through the vicissitudes of life. We shall see later in the section on irony how precisely this is supposed to be maintained. For now, it is enough to note that Schlegel's analysis of progression according to the *Wechselerweis* does not commit him to a teleological picture of human cognitive vocation, whether to an external account of teleology in which one progresses to the extent that one discovers, say, God's purposes for the world or to an internal teleology, such as Hegel's, according to which in retrospection reason or 'spirit' is seen as containing its own algorithm for perfection. Indeed, Schlegel holds that mistaking 'regular' conceptions of progress for romantic ones will blind one to the latter.

⁶¹ KFSA 2: 182–3.

⁶² A568/B596.

*B. Contextualism, experiential underdetermination,
and the scope of regulative reason*

Schlegel places a good deal of emphasis on one particular form of conceptual construction, that of first-person imaginative or 'perspectival' variance. More than systems bound together by nested causal or inferential rules, he construes such variation as central to subjectivity and its experience. Given this, one might interpret Schlegel to hold that conceptual aggregation lends experiential substance to subjectivity only by overindulging the destructive intellectual force of skepticism by allowing merely possible ways of thinking of the world to undermine any sense in which the world *as given* constrains human responsiveness. The power of being able to move thought across its possible objects might be understood as standing surrogate for thought bound by norms. Particularly alarming to some is the idea that variance of concepts or conceptual schemes is unconstrained by an a priori or otherwise necessary base structure. To put the point a bit sensationally: if one, like Schlegel, holds that reflection can only exhibit proper discursive limitation relative to the basic source of world-structures by raising and then defeating at every turn reflective pretensions to model the world as it uniquely is, then the very idea of the world being any one way can only be a tissue of illusion, one that is brought on the scene dramatically as a prop, there to be rent by reflection's critical application of itself against itself. As we shall discuss later in chapters two and three, versions of this worry underlie both Hegel's and Kierkegaard's understandings and criticisms of Jena romanticism.⁶³

Relativism is, for some, a topic of great philosophical concern, and the complexities of its various forms have attracted lively treatment, especially where the idea veers into semantic territory. In practice the term 'relativism' is, however, often more a brickbat than a cohesive charge against many positions at which it is aimed. Concern over relativism is sometimes thinly veiled turf warfare concerning what it takes to properly constrain thought in a particular domain or context. The guiding idea, that the scope of claims is often indexed to background

⁶³ The concern is also centrally present in many Hegel-inspired considerations of romanticism. See Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1955); Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'art de l'âge moderne: l'esthétique et la philosophie de l'art du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); and Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*. Hegelian in their own ways, but less dismissive, are interpretations of philosophical romanticism as committed to a kind of Platonism. See, for instance, Beiser, *German Idealism; The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Some commentators view the false choice between Schlegel and Hegel as one between 'nihilism' and 'rational perfectionism'. See Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life*, p. 85. I hope to show that Schlegel is no nihilist and Hegel is only with significant qualification a rationalist.

contextual conditions is hard not to credit generally. It is always pertinent to step back to ask questions concerning ambit when the scope (i.e. universality) and modality (i.e. necessity) of claims are in play. It pays to substitute for the term 'relativism' the less confrontational term 'contextualism'; in what follows I adopt that practice.

Now, one primary concern might be whether Schlegel holds that what are considered by idealists to be basic conceptual constraints on representing the world—e.g. the forms of intuition and the categories for Kant—are open to imaginative variation. Does Schlegel, for instance, hold that the class of comprehensive orientations that are subject to modulation includes the philosophical bases for physics? Could a scheme be subject to modification to the extent that it would no longer contain a concept of efficient cause or would include a third form of intuition?

Addressing this question of scope and the worry that Schlegel advocates a radical form of contextualism brings one to the third of the family of doctrines Schlegel deploys in order to discuss the theoretical and experiential point of reference that conceptual variance can take to 'indicate' the absolute: what I referred to earlier in passing as the doctrine of 'global regulative reason'. More specifically, it is plausible to attribute to Schlegel a doctrine that one might call 'bifurcated global regulativism'. Regulativism more generally is the view that the strictest and most general constraints on human experience amount to what Kant calls merely regulative principles.⁶⁴ Merely regulative principles for Kant are transcendently necessary; they are not merely hypothetically posited. Such principles or laws are produced by pure reason according to its own non-defeasible and ineluctable demands and are thus strictly rationally necessary. But while such principles are strictly necessary, they are not constitutive. They *must* regulate experience generally by rendering it at least 'problematically' structurally amenable to finite discursive cognitive purposes, which amenability one cannot derive from constitutive principles alone; for Kant, the logic of empirical discovery is one such structure.⁶⁵ Still, the principles involved transcend and do not properly constitute experience: they involve ideas, not schematized a priori concepts. Schlegel treats *all* general principles and laws, even those that are

⁶⁴ In the secondary literature on Kant one often sees the term 'regulative' stand in for the phrase 'merely regulative' in this context. This is not strictly correct: all a priori principles are regulative for Kant. Constitutive principles are regulative by default. Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant et le pouvoir de juger* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993) is a penetrating and systematically rigorous reminder of this point, which the best German-language commentary on Kant—e.g. that of Cohen, Natorp, Simmel, Cassirer, Reich, and Henrich—also stresses.

⁶⁵ For three different and differing systematic statements, see A642–68/B670–96; AA 5: 181–94; and AA 20: 208–21, 226–32.

taken to govern the basic features of experience, to be regulative yet necessary in this sense.

Now, there might seem an obvious, Kantian objection to one way of understanding the claim that all principles within experience are regulative because they do not apply to or issue from the absolute. One might think that Schlegel conceives of the absolute as an undifferentiated *entity*, one which completely transcends discursive modes of presentation, akin to what Kant calls a thing in itself. Correcting for the slight asymmetry introduced by Kant's requirement that there be multiple such things (whereas Schlegel must hold that there would be only one such), one might see a very strong parallel between the absolute and things in themselves, if one takes Schlegel to hold that the absolute is a thing or has to be conceived along the lines of a thing. But Schlegel holds that one may not coherently think of the absolute as an entity. True, a Kantian might deem the proviso that all principles are regulative excessively cautious, or even redundant. For is there a more threadbare article of Kantian metaphysics than claiming that the categories do not apply to things in themselves? It would banal and unworthy of comment if Schlegel were saying no more than this. Kantians will, indeed, must allow for the application of regulative concepts to the metaphysically transcendent; although Kant does not say so, one might even think treating things in themselves as entities tokens a merely regulative posit. Is Schlegel merely forwarding this anodyne view? Schlegel does deny that any law that operates within experience, even if that law were to constrain formally and entirely generally what can count as any experience, is inapplicable to the absolute. To that extent, he tracks the simple Kantian point. But there is more. Kant allows that one may properly think of things in themselves as related to one another so long as one does not transgress the epistemic limitations put in place by the critical philosophy. The Kantian can, so to speak, talk out of both sides of her mouth about things in themselves. On the one hand, it is impermissible to characterize things in themselves bluntly as objects of possible experience, i.e. by applying concepts to them that would be pertinent to the possibility of phenomenal knowledge; on the other hand, one can assert that speculative reason must at least analogically or 'fictively' conceive of the absolute in such terms. Hence the classic Kantian case: it is not proper to say flatfootedly that things in themselves are in efficient-causal relations, but it is necessary for finite discursive beings to *think* of them as standing in epistemically tinged logical relations of ground to consequent. But even this deployment of analogy is objectionable to Schlegel, who abjures *any* positive expression of the absolute in subjective terms. Even if Schlegel grants that the only way one can attempt to *represent* the absolute is as a thing that does not entail that the most basic philosophical way to *grasp* it is to so

represent it. That is indeed a main point of Jena romanticism: to insist that the absolute does not have the character of what it conditions, i.e. things.

Accordingly, one misunderstands the ambit of Schlegel's claim concerning regulative principles if one takes it to pertain merely to what state a Kantian would take to be obvious, albeit important, i.e. that it is only possible to think of what transcends all possible experience by means of regulative concepts. But it would be also mistaken to assume, for all that, that Schlegel adopts that Kantian way of so formulating regulative principles, for Schlegel would view thinking of the absolute as a thing or as thing-like as due to an impermissible seepage of a condition for possible experience into an attempt to model what is not possible to experience.

Schlegel's claim gains in philosophical punch when one tightens the domain of discourse. Kant, neo-Kantians, and idealists following Kant hold that there are constitutive principles that govern what can count as possible experience, although they differ greatly on what such principles are, how they are to be derived, and whether they commit one to absolutely transcendent orders of being. Schlegel may be taken to deny that there are any such across-the-board constitutive principles governing experience. There is ample textual support for this understanding of Schlegel's approach. When he writes that '[u]nhappily I miss the category of "almost" [*Beinahe*] in Kant's table of fundamental concepts. . . . In the mind of a natural skeptic it tinges all the remaining concepts and intuitions,' one might take Schlegel to be asserting that categorical structure need not be considered necessary and universal even within the domain of experience.⁶⁶ There is no denying that this stronger version is present in Schlegel's thought, although there are questions concerning its methodological role, e.g. whether Schlegel forwards this as a metaphysical claim or whether he is entertaining the proposition for ironic rhetorical purposes (more on this later). Schlegel is not alone in suggesting this stronger, more 'pragmatist' position; it is perhaps best seen in certain statements of Novalis to the effect that there are no non-regulative principles at all at the level of reflection.⁶⁷ Novalis writes:

Representation—genus—*concepts in general* are nothing real, they have only ideal use. Thus also is I, etc. a regulative idea. The whole of philosophy is only a science of

⁶⁶ LFr 80, KFSA 2: 157.

⁶⁷ See FS IV. 502, NS 2: 258. Similarly, when Novalis states that 'the quest for first things is nonsense [*Unsinn*], a regulative idea' (FS IV. 472, NS 2: 254) (emphasis supplied), he is stressing the point that, given constraints of finitude, the search for first principles of a discursive nature should always be considered open, and indeed *essentially* open. Still, statements such as 'reason itself is only an ordering idea' (FS IV. 480, NS 2: 256,) allow for a more moderate reading, according to which, in a standard Kantian way, the faculty of *pure* reason has this regulative role with regard to experience.

reason—merely of regulative use—exclusively ideal—*without the slightest reality in the true sense of the word* (emphases in original).⁶⁸

This would be anathema to Kant, although not to every late form of neo-Kantianism, e.g. Cassirer, Emil Lask. What counts as ‘experience’ for the Jena writers is in principle a moving target and serves neither as a premise nor a conclusion to a transcendental argument. To think otherwise, as Schlegel never tires of pointing out, is to cease ‘criticism’. Nevertheless, global regulativism is consistent with a broader Kantian concern: to highlight the toll that subjectivity necessarily exacts on foundational thought. For some Kantians, this sort of intra-experiential non-foundationalism will have untoward results at the intersection of transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of science. It may be replied that it is not absolutely clear to what extent Kant wanted to argue that even his metaphysics of nature by itself yields Newtonian physics, so vigilance about additional, fewer, or just different categorical (or intuitional) constraints might not be such a bad thing. Indeed, some neo-Kantians might welcome this openness in principle depending on what they think about the impact of subsequent science on Kant’s metaphysics. Finally, it is worth emphasizing the somewhat Quinean flavor of this concern: it is the ‘in principle’ aspect of the romantic approach that needs stressing; Schlegel never forwards a different set of categories or argues that there is *complete* indeterminacy at any empirical level. His view is rather that the very impulse to settle on determinacy must be held at arm’s length.⁶⁹

That said, the question of how fine-grained Schlegel’s sense of ‘mere regulation’ *need be* to allow for what he most deeply wishes for his theory of subjectivity—i.e. whether it involves an across-the-board denial of invariable experiential structure or whether, rather, it allows that there are some such structures that govern experience abstractly—is by no means an idle one. Simply put: idealist accounts of the constitutive power of subjectivity intersect with the requirement also dear to some forms of idealism that idealism ground the best empirical science. The point of intersection, philosophically speaking is to argue for strictly invariant formal powers on the part of all subjects, powers without which they would not count as subjects at all. The chief resistance to positions

⁶⁸ FS IV. 479, NS 2: 256; cf. FS IV. 480, NS 2: 256.

⁶⁹ Novalis, who had greater interest in natural science than did Schlegel, attempts to give a deduction of sorts for inversions of Kantian categories in terms of his own *ordo inversus* procedure. See FS I.19–20, 38–41, NS 2: 115–18, 129–32; see also the discussion of this doctrine later in this chapter.

like Schlegel's (and Novalis') that no rule governing experience—even that which approaches base levels of structure—is unrevisable because strictly invariant comes from the scientific sectors of idealism and neo-Kantianism, all the more demanding the more what most idealists take to be the basic undergirding science, modern physics, achieves greater and greater adequate mathematical expression. Surely mathematical structure is 'invariant' in the sense intended and with it physics so expressed.

Hoary questions in the philosophy of mathematics and the philosophy of physics aside, it is not necessary for Schlegel to wade into these waters, much less swim in them (as if he could have!). This brings us back to a catch term we introduced before without much explication: 'bifurcated global regulativism'. No satisfactory answer to the challenge of the physical sciences to is available if one does not see a connection between and a way around what look to be two mutually exclusive alternatives. On the one hand, there is the unalloyed global claim for regulativism. This threatens to run up against strong presumptions of invariance, and thus of true laws, that operate across the board when it comes to the structuration of experience on a roughly idealist model of such. One might be able to circumvent or argue directly against the presumption of course, but Schlegel has no such argument. Unrestricted regulativism and scientific constitutivism seem mutual exclusive in the domain of experience. Bifurcated global relativism is the view that: (1) one should always for purposes of constant criticism attempt to extend the ambit of the claim that all there is are merely regulative principles, even into those domains that seem well-settled as to their constitutive principles, and (2) within the target domains structured by concepts that emerge from historical processes and involve practical evaluation, it is settled that all possible principles are merely regulative. (1) answers to the (now qualified) global element of the tag 'bifurcated global regulativism', as does (2), if one adjusts 'global' to mean 'global across domains of human values'. The doctrine is bifurcated because the philosopher is enjoined to alternate between both elements, which now present themselves as complimentary.

This is, I believe, a plausible third way to reconstruct Schlegel's oscillation on the question of the precise ambit and depth of regulative posits. The experiential structures that predominantly concern Schlegel involve concrete, historically situated ethical and social meaning. Even the basic constituents of experience in this domain can vary a great deal given any natural laws, yielding significant underdetermination of the relevant phenomena. Schlegel wishes to address the relation of the absolute to subjectivity and how that relation manifests within the experience of one's subjectivity. All Schlegel requires for this is copious underdetermination in the domain of subjective and intersubjective self-understanding

of a broadly social, political, ethical, and aesthetic caste, *not* complete variability. As a result, a primary concern to Schlegel—a concern developed in his early study of Greek language and literature and carried through his Jena period and then to his study of classical Persian and Sanskrit later—is history. It is typical of him to insist that concepts in many experiential domains can only have their content as a matter of contingent historical development of that content. Indeed, not only concepts, but also desires, beliefs, emotions, and hopes require for their understanding that they be situated in terms of the particular society and the historical time at which they function.⁷⁰ The degree of fixity that objects falling under such concepts have over and above the minimum relative fixity afforded by transcendental law in many experiential cases is due to the systematic roles that the concepts of such objects play in more or less comprehensive and coherent systems of empirical representation and expression. Such systems are internally complex and, for a variety of pragmatic reasons, may even be considered necessary to sustain and perpetuate complex but reasonably unified forms of life. Viewed in terms of strict universality and necessity, however, such systems are ultimately elastic; the degree of structural invariance of objects, and *pari passu* of concepts, is a deliverance of the particular scheme in question. Given the overall commitments of a scheme, that invariance could approach necessity-for-that-scheme, and in this sense Schlegel is a meaning holist. This is where the idea of a regulative principle has its second use: viewed from the broadest ambit of possible experience as a whole—from *whatever* perspective on that one can achieve—even core elements of experiential schemata will be regulative. But, viewed from the perspective of a particular scheme, such core elements will be properly constitutive.

Schlegel then touts the stronger claim at times, that *all* reason is regulative, on (A) methodological and (B) rhetorical grounds. Exposition of (B) must wait for our discussion of the role of irony in Schlegel's thought below. One can understand (A) against the background afforded by the doctrine of reciprocal proof. As we saw, one must distinguish two interrelated components or processes within the structure of reciprocal proof: *intensive* and *extensive*. The intensive dimension pertains to how one must think of the sort of completeness that the absolute has relative to the activity of its founded modes—individuated human subjects. Broadly, subjects relate back to the absolute mediately, through the proof activity, and this activity reveals that the absolute contains possibility without discrete possibilities—its completeness is that of an undifferentiated totality, not of an articulated series or a composite. The extensive part of the proof structure has to

⁷⁰ AFr 226, KFSa 2: 201–2; I 139, KFSa 2: 270.

do with how this relation to the positing of the absolute provides impetus for actual human activity. Subjectivity is determined by reference to its source in the absolute by an infinite structuring and restructuring of the material components of the world in order to approximate in the only way open to finite discursive creatures the completeness of the absolute. Forming a cognitive structure that is constituted by a plural plentitude does this. It is this ongoing structuring activity that is paramount for the subject, giving him a heightened sense of his subjectivity. Indeed, as we have seen, this continual structuring is so crucial that Schlegel holds that everything that is so structured has to be considered a candidate for restructuring, an idea the effects of which we shall see in more detail below when we turn to irony.

This reminder makes it clearer why Schlegel might hold that one must keep in play both possible scopes for regulative reason. On the one hand, any set of systematic claims about the world will be dependent on and bounded by the cognitive stock that is available at any one time in any one social-historical framework. Relative to that framework certain claims may be indispensable. It may be hard to imagine any framework that would lack the concept of efficient causation, for instance, and, as a matter of practice, there may be little critical potential in questioning such a concept. That is, most of the orientations towards which subjects might hold critical views with an eye either towards a change in circumstance and conception or retention of the same, will not be about basic physical categories.

That said, the physical, chemical, and biological sciences as they stood at Schlegel's time were still very sensitive to teleological reasoning and, therefore, involved elements of object-intentionality. Because collectively the sciences were held in principle to constitute a unified account of nature, the conditions for systematicity of even physics included final causality as a structure. Physics, one might say, was but a part of the 'philosophy of nature', which was the primary philosophical category in the philosophy of science of the time, and this means that cutting edge philosophy of physics of the time (e.g. Kant's) still needed to harbor teleological explanation to secure its internal systematicity. More to the point, physics had to be responsive to and 'unified' with nascent biology and chemistry, sciences whose very claims were viewed as involving final causal explanation. In general, what constraints operated to unify sciences—and whether indeed the idea of 'unified science' even made sense—was less settled at the time than it perhaps is at present. One might understand Schlegel's willingness to treat even scientific categories as malleable not only under pressure from new empirical evidence, but in themselves and without remainder, as a holdover of the force that teleological principles exerted on base physical categories.

Teleology is modeled strongly still in terms of rational structure, in nature *interpreted* as purposive. And where there is interpretation there can always be reinterpretation.

Yet another reason that Schlegel might press the stronger version of regulativism is that it provides incursion into another idea of Kant's that he wishes to reject: that moral agency involves rational self-dominion. In Schlegel's estimation Kant radically underappreciates the effect of conceptual variance upon moral agency. As is well known, Kant holds that moral agency is supernatural in character, making its appeal to a form of first cause under the aspect of invariant, 'pure' practical reason. But for Schlegel that is just to conjure moral direction from out of the absolute, something he rules out of court. So, while it is true that Kant allows that there can be no theoretical knowledge of having acted morally and, on this basis, holds it transcendently necessary to posit further regulative conditions (e.g. the *summum bonum*) in order to give coherence to moral vocation relative to empirical character, Schlegel still would not view the absolute as giving a *law* according to which moral actions were counted as moral (or not). Schlegel denies not only that the absolute is law-like or provides laws from out of itself, but the entire Kantian picture of ethical agency as standing under a law.

In sum, Schlegel's intent to keep the door open to global regulativism, while emphasizing matters that would implicate mainly underdetermination of concrete social and historical phenomena, expresses his substantial reworking of Fichte's doctrine of striving. Whatever permanence natural regularity enjoys relative to subjective formal activity, such permanence would be too impoverished to account in any interesting way for social or ethical structure. Since one understands one's subjectivity in terms that are much richer than any such invariance—in terms of imaginative projection over concrete historical lived situations—the constant concern of the Kantian with necessity as it does or might operate in abstract physical patterns is for Schlegel beside the point. Along such lines, one might venture that Schlegel's most radical statements, statements that do seem to argue for plasticity in all cognition, are operating regulatively as well, so to speak, at second-order. Such views caution placing a priori (or really any antecedent) limits on the conjunction of reason and imagination that might serve to defeat the subject's responsiveness to the world and to itself. As a methodological matter, that is, one should hold any set of putatively fixed barriers to 'thinking otherwise' to be in principle defeasible. This does not require asserting that such barriers are illusory or entirely non-binding; but their bindingness is tempered with a proleptic attitude towards their possible variance. Schlegel's claim, it is worth reiterating, is a radicalization of Kant's category of the 'merely regulative' rather than a constitutive claim. As such it is a competitor to

views like those of the early Schelling or Hegel, according to which the category 'merely regulative yet transcendently necessary' is inherently problematic, and where being necessary and being constitutive coincide. Schlegel urges watchfulness with regard to claims of conceptual fixity—such are to be considered merely regulative and, like regulative principles in Kant, can generate illusion if their provisional status is unmarked. One finds echoes of this caution in the views of the Southwest neo-Kantians like Windelband and Rickert, who are concerned with a connected set of questions involving the relation of natural science to social science, historicism, and the connection of reason to imagination. Schlegel never says this precisely; so our reconstruction of his view on the matter is admittedly speculative. But it does have the triple advantage of (1) making sense of what seem to be two competing aspects of his thought on matters of possible conceptual variance, (2) delineating a possible reception history of these concepts in later nineteenth-century thought jointly influenced by Kant and romanticism, and (3) showing the philosophical interest of the resulting view.

There is no denying that Schlegel was apt to take the most outrageous philosophical positions in order to increase rhetorical and critical impact—in order to stun or jolt one out of conceptual complacency.⁷¹ Perhaps he takes the most radical position possible on the variability of general constraints on experience in order to so shock the reader or, slightly more substantively, to test what can count as invariant against an ever-expanding envelope of what can count as experience.⁷² To do justice to the philosophical dimension of this rhetorical impulse, and connect it with Schlegel's account of conceptual variance as a means of subjective self-experience, we must turn to the last of the three main doctrines in Schlegel's thought: irony.

⁷¹ This combination of impetuosity and declamation is what Roberto Calasso calls (with specific reference to Schlegel) 'la letteratura assoluta'. *La letteratura e gli dèi* (Milano: Adelphi, 2001), p. 57; cf. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's *L'Absolu littéraire*. Calasso is interested, much more than are Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, in the status of mythology in romanticism and modernism. Part of Schlegel's greatness for Calasso resides in his rejection of antiquated and merely rhetorical use of mythology in favor of a constitutive function for mythology in poetry (and philosophy). Calasso holds that the 'heroic age of absolute literature begins in 1798 with Schlegel's *Athenäum* and ends precisely a century later, with the death of Mallarmé'. What is called 'modernism', Calasso holds, is but an aftereffect of romanticism. See *La letteratura*, p. 143.

⁷² Benjamin stresses this, both in his interpretation of the romantics and in his own theory of conceptual connection via 'constellations'. See Fred Rush, 'Mikroanalyse, Genealogie, Konstellationsforschung', in *Konstellationsforschung*, ed. M. Mulsow and M. Stamm (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 149–72 and 'Jena Romanticism and Benjamin's Critical Epistemology', in *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. B. Hanssen and A. Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 123–36.

C. Interlude: the centrality of poetry and interpretation in Schlegel

Prior to turning to irony in light of the foregoing doctrines of reciprocal proof and global regulativism, it is important to introduce another component of Schlegel's thought, one that forms a bridge between those doctrines and irony: his conception of the philosophical importance of poetic expression.

Philosophy properly aims at both generality and precision in result; in the historical period after Kant it also takes stringent systematicity to be one of its main goals.⁷³ Schlegel holds that it is possible to address the relation of subjectivity to the absolute in ways that answer to the systematic urges of philosophy, but also contends that the impulse to systematize is always in danger of obscuring that relation by taking discursive thought as basic and attempting to capture the absolute in it. Classically, as theories become more explanatorily inclusive, they tend also to become more ontologically exclusive. Increases in explanatory power are often increases in univocity; for instance, greater power to explain involves greater reduction of disparate laws to fewer basic ones. Coordinately, explaining powerfully implicates ruling out other possible explanations. Philosophical theories are not usually strictly explanatory, of course, but one might still think that they take their cue about what can count formally as a theory from the sciences, which are. One might especially think that this is so in the historical period following the advent of Newtonian physics, which saw rapid development in biology and chemistry and inherited a view of the connection between philosophy and the sciences as being especially tight. From the romantic perspective, all of the above tempts a substitution of theory for the absolute. One might expect the romantics to reject the systematic impulse outright. But Schlegel steers to middle ground, holding that there are non-standard forms of philosophical theorizing that retain some features of systematic thought but moderate others and thereby make a better job of explicating the concept of the absolute within the theoretical ambit. Such new forms of philosophy are the results of marrying what was for Schlegel idealist philosophical practice with aspects of artistic expression—especially, aspects of poetic practice.

⁷³ Kant of course thought his views were presented in a perfectly systematic manner: in a 1787 letter to Reinhold, he forwards the third *Critique* as the completion of the system (AA 10: 513–15). From the Kantian perspective, the inference from presence of dualism (of the sort Kant forwards) to non-systematicity is unwarranted; a philosophical system for Kant preserves a harmony between the two contrasting aspects of our finite natures and does not require their unity at all—indeed, it forbids it.

A. STAKING MIDDLE GROUND

The claim that systematic philosophy requires distinctively poetic resources in order to correctly express subjectivity's relation to a ground that cannot be exhibited as such within the subjective domain raises three main initial questions: (1) what is 'poetic practice' for Schlegel? (2) why would its incorporation into systematic philosophy make the latter better able to express the relation of the absolute to subjectivity? and (3) what formally characterizes resulting philosophical-poetic systems? Even at the outset of answering these questions one thing is clear: whatever effect poetic practice might have on philosophical expression of the absolute, that effect cannot be to circumvent reflection by providing philosophy with immediate, non-reflective access to the absolute. Poetry instead must express the relation between finite subjectivity and the absolute indirectly by modeling the *elusiveness* of the absolute, its fugitive nature, in conceptual terms.

Schlegel's central claim is that poetry's superiority as a source for a theory of the absolute is due to its ability to articulate groupings of ideas that compel serious philosophical understanding but are nevertheless irreducible to a final, comprehensive unity. Structurally, poetry is able to involve philosophical understanding while recognizing that the 'result' of the exercise of that understanding will not exhaust its object and should not even attempt to do so. Schlegel can be dismissive about the details of Kant's aesthetic theory, but this much he would have to admit: the impact of this balance struck by alert understanding of poetry engages subjectivity in an activity that has the general structure of 'purposiveness without purpose', for such activity responds to things without making determination of the thing in question or the fixity of the subject relative to such determination the point of the subjective engagement. The subjective forces that might otherwise be marshaled on the side of determination are conscripted and made subservient to the exercise of what Schlegel takes to be a more basic cognitive power, i.e. interpretative imagination. Poetry is best equipped for the task of bringing to mind the absolute as the present-absent ground for subjectivity. One might hazard a trick formulation: in virtue of its elliptical nature, poetry makes the absence of presence a presence of absence. Poetry indicates more than it could possibly be determined as saying and leaves its content *suggestively indeterminate*. This impossibility of 'completing' a work through understanding it—through its interpretation—is the feature of poetry that primarily attracts Schlegel, along with the effect that the incompleteness has on the audience, of inviting it to understand it under the condition of the impossibility of complete comprehension. In fact, Schlegel holds that this is the condition

constitutive of criticism and interpretation *tout court*. Schlegel's general recommendation is, then, that reflective engagement in experience is best modeled after poetry's relation to its interpretation. For poetry's structure brings home most vividly the inability on the part of the subject, even when using her most basic native resources, to grasp ultimate meaning (i.e. the absolute) *in the very act of trying to do so*. The experience of poetry in this way best instantiates the fundamental experience of being human, the situation of being ineluctably reflective yet in necessary relationship to a fundamental semantic source that can never be grasped in that fashion. Schlegel exemplifies just this situation—in which one forms oneself and discovers oneself as so formed by striving to display the absolute's discursive elusiveness—in his literary output as well as in his philosophical aesthetics.

B. 'POETRY': GREEK, MODERN, ROMANTIC

'Poetry' for Schlegel does not just mean any poetry, nor does he restrict the meaning of the term to literary genre; rather, it is for him a word that comes to include within its extension verse, novels, and even some theoretical writing. 'Art' and, most importantly, 'romantic' art are similarly pliable. Schlegel was embroiled in heated theoretical discussions concerning the nature of poetry from his first critical output, several essays throughout the 1790s, including what is perhaps his best-known work on the literature of antiquity, 'Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie' (1795/97), and culminating in the draft of the *History of the Poetry of the Greeks and Romans* (1798), the completion of which he abandoned. The crucial historical backdrop for his literary thought in these early works is the evergreen (at least at that time) question of the comparative merits of 'ancient' and 'modern' poetry—*la querelle des anciens et des modernes*.

It goes almost without saying that Schlegel was philhellenic (Schiller coined a special term for Schlegel's devotion to the Greeks, 'Graecomania'), and the extravagant praise he heaps on classical poetry in his formative writings might cause one to wonder what is left for 'the moderns' to do in its wake. Schlegel writes for instance that Greek poetry, especially epic, provides an invariant compass for artistic taste and correct judgment,⁷⁴ finding its material in what is eternal and, because eternal, beautiful.⁷⁵ Similar conceptual ground is covered in

⁷⁴ KFSa 1: 275, 318f.

⁷⁵ KFSa 1: 296f. As was usual for the times, Schlegel makes a distinction between the poet of the *Iliad* and the poet of the *Odyssey*. Atypically, though, Schlegel associates the authorship of the *Odyssey* with the more realistic or even naturalistic ideal. The *Iliad* represents a reworking of the material of the story that exemplifies the freedom of the artist, whereas the *Odyssey* reveals a more receptive artist (KFSa 1: 482).

even more metaphysically charged terms when Schlegel writes of Greek poetry, as one would write of substance, that it is entirely self-contained and self-subsistent.⁷⁶ Schlegel's earliest writings tend to favor ancient poetry on account of its allegedly more objective basis, discounting what he calls the 'merely interesting' character of modern art. Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, Schlegel does not impute to the archaic Greeks an unreflective naturalness. He does attribute to them, nonetheless, an unstudied realism that tokens an imagination more spontaneously at home in nature than is possible for the modern poet.⁷⁷ Schlegel's view of Greek poetry, in short, is that it is perfect, but—and this is a crucial qualification—it is only perfect *for the Greeks*. Schlegel anticipates Hegel's more famous treatment on this point, holding that the perfection of Greek art is relative to the limited conception of human freedom available to the classical world.⁷⁸ That is, the Greek world is one in which art *can* be 'completed' according to its native structuring principle, beauty. There can be no more purely beautiful art than Greek art, but perfectly beautiful art isn't everything and, most importantly, it turns out in Schlegel's slightly later writings not to be as valuable as the modern philosophical discovery of discursive approaches to the absolute.⁷⁹ It is precisely the maligned category of 'the interesting', which becomes in Schlegel's works two years later a positive hallmark of the philosophical approach to questions of subjectivity. (The jury is out on whether this change of heart on the relative importance of ancient and modern poetry was due to Schlegel's knowledge of Schiller's work at the time.) Modern conceptions of freedom, which must include a tension between nature and reason, require artists to remake nature in order to treat it as significant in relation to their freedom. Naturalism and realism eschew this and, therefore, are inappropriate measures for modern poetry. Again foreshadowing Hegel, Schlegel argues that modern poetry must be 'artificial' (*künstlich*) because of its relationship to a superior conception of freedom. For this reason Schlegel avers that modern poetry's primary aesthetic effect is not beauty, but sublimity.⁸⁰ One might say that this alignment of modern poetry with sublimity prefigures within Schlegel's earliest aesthetic writings the conception of the absolute to come.

What, then, does this contrast of ancient to modern poetry amount to philosophically for Schlegel? He holds that reflecting on the contrast is the first step in ushering in a new period of art making and theorizing. This new period would

⁷⁶ KFSa 1: 297–8.

⁷⁷ Cf. Schiller's 'Über naïve und sentimentale Poesie', NA 20: 413–503.

⁷⁸ KFSa 1: 276–96. ⁷⁹ KFSa 1: 288ff.

⁸⁰ KFSa 1: 255; cf. Schiller's early essay 'Vom Erhabene', NA 20: 171–95.

not be a simple synthesis of the ancient and the modern; rather, it would represent a new conception, neither ancient nor modern, of art's role in experience, but motivated always with an eye to the period's historical and conceptual forebears. One cannot settle the *querelle* in the given terms of modern intellectual life. One must step beyond such terms, and romanticism is that step. Romanticism is thus the successor to the art of the moderns, or more accurately, it is modernism clarified by an adequate grasp of its difference from Greek art.

As with 'poetry', Schlegel's use of the term 'romantic' is quite expansive.⁸¹ Like the designations 'ancient' and 'modern', he often employs the term *chronologically* to denote a historical period and its overall poetic practice. He categorizes the period extending from the European Middle Ages to his own present as 'romantic' in this sense, and at times he emphasizes particularly Latinate (i.e. Roman-derived) literature from this period. (Here, again, is an important source for Hegel.) But he also uses such terms to denote *types* of poetry. It thus involves no contradiction to hold that one might write classically in the modern period or modernly in the ancient context. This explains why Schlegel feels free to speak of all manner of 'modern' works as 'romantic', e.g. *La divina Commedia*, *Quixote*, *The Tempest*, *Tristram Shandy*, among others.⁸² What is perhaps even a bit more surprising is that he considers few of the poetic and fictional prose works of his contemporaries romantic, with the notable exception of Jean Paul.⁸³ More interesting to him were the translation projects of his brother and Tieck that took the bygone romantics Cervantes and Shakespeare as models and found German romantic equivalents for them. Yet a third way that Schlegel deploys the term 'romantic' is to denote a particular *genre* of literature, namely the novel and its sub-genres, e.g. medieval romances, fantastic or supernatural literature. The etymology here is clear (*roman* = 'romantic'), but Schlegel so distends the sense of what can count as a 'novel' that this third use of the term often slides into one or the other of the first two. In some cases, as where medieval romances are at issue (e.g. those of Chrétien de Troyes), the combination of chronology, typology, and genre is not likely to confuse, but the multitude of *romans* that Schlegel is apt to acknowledge sometimes strains plausibility (is *The Tempest* really a novel, after all?). Complicating matters even further is that Schlegel's view

⁸¹ See AFr 116, KFSa 2: 182–3. A useful collection of essays on the history of the term is "Romantic" and Its Cognates: *The European History of a Word*, ed. H. Eichner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

⁸² See KFSa 2: 329f. for a hierarchy of 'modern' writers in these terms.

⁸³ See Fred Rush, 'Jean Paul', in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. M. Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): III.73–4 for a discussion of the tenuous relation of Jean Paul to romanticism. In chapter two I discuss Jean Paul in relation to Hegel's understanding of subjective humor.

of what counts as 'romantic' in this third usage is impacted by his very developed taxonomy within the category of the novel,⁸⁴ by his claim that novels are a species of philosophy,⁸⁵ and by his insistence that an individual life is something on the order of an unwritten novel.⁸⁶

There are two final bits of terminology to attempt to stabilize relative to the others: two more critical and philosophically significant distinctions that Schlegel deploys in his aesthetic writings and that we have already mentioned in passing. The first of these is the distinction between what he calls 'objective' and 'subjective' poetry, which maps onto the division between ancient and modern. 'Objective' poetry is poetry that exhibits fidelity to objects of nature. Because of the connection that Schlegel draws between ancient realism and naturalness, this means that objective poetry is poetry in which the human place in the world is reflected as an unproblematic natural fact. The objective poem has the status of myth, i.e. of a given order. 'Subjective' poetry, on the other hand, is the result of individual invention on the part of the poet and demands autonomous interpretive response. One might be compelled to *understand* a myth in a mythic culture, but the idea of *interpreting* myths is thoroughly modern. Second, Schlegel glosses objective poetry as 'disinterested' and subjective poetry as 'interested'.

⁸⁴ Best gleaned from his essay 'Fragmente zur Literatur und Poesie' [1797] (KFSA 16: 113ff.). The novel (*Roman*) is divisible into two general classes: 'poetic' and 'prosaic'. In the first belong two subtypes: the 'fantastic' (Schlegel's example is Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*) and the 'sentimental' (Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata*). 'Psychologicist' (Diderot's *La religieuse*) and 'philosophic' (Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*) novels are in the second class. Schlegel's ideal is to mix all of these forms. This injunction to mix is extended to classical forms as well: modern novels of different sorts might be spliced with epics, for example. These hybrids result in what he calls 'universal poetry'. Schlegel also proposes that the novel and poetry more generally develop dialectically in terms of genres. Novels begin with absolute difference between the real and the ideal (i.e. in alienation). This is *satire*. When the novel recognizes the interdependence of these two things and 'hovers' [*schwebt*] between them, *elegy* is the result. An absolute identity of the two extremes produces *idyll* (AFr 238, KFSA 2: 204). Yet another way he puts this dialectic is in terms of the theoretical explication of poetry that starts with an 'antithetical, unbridgeable gap' between art and natural beauty and describes the struggle to show their harmony. There are three stages of such explication: (a) to provide principles of a pure poetics, (b) to develop a theory of particular genres of modern poetry, and (c) to develop a theory of the novel proper (AFr 252, KFSA 2: 207–8). The importance for Hegel of taxonomies such as these is obvious.

⁸⁵ For instance, novels are the 'Socratic dialogues of our time' (LFr 26, KFSA 2: 149).

⁸⁶ 'Isn't it unnecessary to write more than one novel, unless the artist has become a new human being?' (LFr 89, KFSA 2: 158). In a related vein, Schlegel offers:

Many of the very best novels are compendia, encyclopedia of the entire spiritual life of a brilliant individual [*eines genialischen Individuums*]. Works that are this way, even if in an entirely different form like *Nathan* [Lessing's drama *Nathan der Weise* –FR], take on because of it the hue of the novel. Every human being who is educated [*gebildet*] and educates himself contains within him a novel. It is not necessary that he express and write it down. (LFr 78, KFSA 2: 156)

'Disinterest' (*ohne Interesse*) of course is a prominent term in Kant's aesthetic theory, and one might think that Schlegel is tracking Kant's use of the term. That would not exactly be a mistake, but the matter is more complicated than it might seem at first.⁸⁷ For Kant disinterest is a property of what he calls 'aesthetic reflective judgment', i.e. an authentic judgment of taste. Schlegel seems to have been engaged only at a remove with Kant's aesthetics, an impression that is strengthened when one looks at the use to which Schlegel puts this word. First of all, *works*, not judgments, are disinterested for Schlegel. Given this shift from subjective capacities to judge to the object to be judged, one might think that Schlegel is following Schiller's more objective version of Kant's theory, which allows beauty to be non-derivatively predicated of objects.⁸⁸ But unlike both Kant and Schiller, Schlegel does not think that disinterest is invariably either a good-making property of a work or the correct aesthetic responsiveness to all works. Rather, 'disinterested' is a descriptive term whose use relative to works and audiences must be sensitive to historical contexts of making and attending to works. In fact it is ancient (i.e. Greek) poetry, *not* modern, that is disinterested for Schlegel; disinterested poetry's integrity does not depend on authorial aims to be uniquely expressive or on audiences responding to such work as expressions of artistic individuality. A disinterested work for Schlegel is the reverse of this; it is obdurate, working without reference to intent. So, the terms 'disinterested' and 'objective' are correlative for Schlegel, the former term referring to a property of the work in virtue of its psychological cause and effect and the latter to the work's ontological status. Modern poetry is, on the other hand, 'interesting' or 'interested'. Just as Schlegel equates objectivity and non-individuation of author and audience with disinterest, he holds that individuality, critical distance, and even skepticism is characteristic of interesting poetry (*interessante Poesie*). Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to suggest that Schlegel's use of the term stresses several interconnected meanings of the cognate Latin word '*interesse*' that are not part of the standard sense of the term in the aesthetics of his day, i.e. 'to be different', 'to be differentiated', or even 'to be between'.⁸⁹ In any event, modern poetry is non-integrated by classical standards, insofar as its genres proliferate and mix depending on whether such genres and their mixtures continue to carry expressive potential rather than on whether they track a particular conception of nature.

⁸⁷ Here the otherwise dependable René Wellek, *The Romantic Age*, vol. 3 of *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 11 misleads.

⁸⁸ See KFSa 1: 208; cf. LFr 66, KFSa 2: 155 for a retraction.

⁸⁹ Cf. Kierkegaard's discussion of this term. SKJP 178/*Papirer* IV C 100 [1843].

Kant's and Schiller's views that disinterest is a preeminent positive criterion for modern art thus mark them as anachronistic classicists in Schlegel's book.

D. Romantic irony

Let's turn to question (2) posed at the outset of the last section: why would reforming systematic philosophy along poetic lines help one to grasp the relation of subjectivity to the absolute, and do so better than straightforward idealistic theory-building? What is it about 'romantic poetry' that makes it indispensable for philosophical tasks ordinarily assigned to non-poetic theory? Schlegel's answer is: irony. The short detour into Schlegel's literary theory in the preceding subsection has put us in a position to turn specifically to this cornerstone of Schlegel's thought.

A first thing to mark is that 'irony' is not a term that Schlegel deploys in the first instance to denote a literary trope or a type of speech act.⁹⁰ Although he is certainly interested in such effects and in producing them, Schlegel's view of irony takes root more firmly in philosophical treatments of irony that are historically embedded in forms of argumentation:⁹¹ in rhetoric, dialectic, and their relation to skepticism.⁹² Plato's characterization of Socrates is decisive for

⁹⁰ Schlegel offers a typology of various modes of irony and its close cousin wit in 'Über die Unverständlichkeit', KFSa 2: 363–72. He closely associates the kind of unity a literary or philosophical fragment has (see discussion in text, section G) with the exercise of wit in both its making and its appreciation. The faculty of wit has a complex history in modern philosophical psychology. Locke contrasts it with judgment. Whereas judgment discriminates, wit does not; it merely assembles ideas according to whatever likenesses are present. See *Essay* II.xi.2. Hume glosses wit as the capacity of finding similarity in things otherwise not much alike, but does not emphasize its cognitive dimension, stressing instead its connection with agreeableness of company. See *Treatise* II.i.6; *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* VIII. Kant initiates a more cognitive trend, stating that wit is a form of non-determinative (and, in that sense, 'non-conceptual') synthesis (AA 7: 201). Schlegel divides wit into two categories. The first he terms 'mechanical' wit, which is something like analogical thought. The second is what he calls 'chemical' wit, which is truly synthetic, or, as Schlegel sometimes puts it, a form of 'fusion' (*Verschmelzen*) (AFr 366, KFSa 2: 232; cf. KFSa 12: 404). This fusion-synthesis is not a product of rules, but is a sudden and seemingly contingent act that does not, though synthetic, render the synthesized components bereft of all the qualities that mark them as unique (AFr 206, KFSa 2: 197). Schlegel associates wit with systematization as well, at least with the sort that he believes is optimal, both directly (AFr 383, KFSa 2: 236) and indirectly, by asserting a close connection of wit to a species of reason (LFr 104, KFSa 2:159). The concept of wit is also deployed in Schlegel's association of his own view of irony with Socratic *ἐλεγχος* ('*sal Atticum*') (AFr 220, KFSa 2: 200; cf. LFr 126, KFSa 2: 163). Concomitant with this dialectic-dialogic use of the concept is Schlegel's claim that wit is 'logical sociability' (LFr 56, 59, KFSa 2: 154).

⁹¹ Philosophy is the 'true home of irony' (LFr 42, KFSa 2: 152).

⁹² One such historical influence on Schlegel is Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*. Quintilian was immensely influential in fifteenth- through seventeenth-century European thought, where his treatise became the model for acceptability in Latin argument. What is decisive for Schlegel is that Quintilian forwards irony, and rhetoric more generally, as a component in a systematic pedagogical framework that promotes a vision of how life should be lived—one that presents itself explicitly as a

Schlegel's claim that irony is a global phenomenon, a component of meaning generally and not just a particular form that some meanings take.⁹³ Contra Plato, however, it is poetry that can bring this into sharp focus because, among the arts, it most readily incites the intellect to interpretative activity and, at the same time, underdetermines possible interpretation so radically that it serves to undercut any claim for interpretative closure. While Schlegel holds that all poetry has an indeterminacy that reflects the inability to represent the absolute, not all poetry does so self-consciously and explicitly;⁹⁴ that is, not all poetry makes it part of its content to draw attention to its inherent incompleteness and infinite interpretability. Accordingly, Schlegel often calibrates the term 'irony' narrowly to refer to those works that are self-conscious—works that are about being ironic—and such knowingly ironic works exemplify the infinite structure of poetry and of experience in general.⁹⁵ Still, by default, all poetry is at least implicitly ironic for Schlegel; no matter how completely determinate a worldview is set out in a work—e.g. in the *Commedia* or in *Paradise Lost*—he argues that the work bears within it elements alive to its incompleteness and ultimate defeasibility. All work, that is, at least in principle yields its ironic potential up to interpretation, as long as the interpretation in question is geared to force the point. Schlegel holds that, as a general matter, modern works display more overtly their ironic structure, but even the most unequivocal works of classical conception are typified, if not constituted, by irony. It is important to note that this last claim amounts to a revision of his earlier classicizing views on the nature of ancient art; no longer is the objective, disinterested poetry of, say, Pindar a model of mythic probity. It too, if placed under enough critical pressure, will yield a tincture of irony. Admittedly, the point may be that such art is ironic only under modern eyes and thus under conditions of a kind of anachronism. But license to anachronism

turn away from Seneca and Lucan, i.e. Neronian decadence, and as a return to older models, e.g. Cicero. Quintilian is the first authority who explicitly recognizes irony as something on the order of a way of life. See *Instit.* 9.2.44–6.

⁹³ What I am calling 'global irony' corresponds to what Schlegel sometimes calls 'die Ironie der Ironie' (KFSA 2: 369) and roughly to what D. C. Muecke calls 'general irony', of which 'romantic irony' is a subclass. See *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 119ff. It also covers what Wayne Booth terms 'unstable-overt-infinite irony'. See *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 253–7. Both Muecke and Booth continue to be important typological studies of irony, replete with excellent examples. Muecke is also notable, at least within Anglophone literary theory, for being one of the first scholars to call for a reconsideration of Schlegel.

⁹⁴ I 95, KFSA 2: 265.

⁹⁵ Often Schlegel calls explicitly ironic poetry 'transcendental'. Poetry is transcendental when it is both a product of an activity and represents the conditions of its production (AFr 238, KFSA 2: 204).

comes hand in hand with modernity according to Schlegel; it is not anachronism that offends so much as unknowing anachronism. The point remains: the once-bright line distinction Schlegel tended to run in his earlier works between Greek art and more ironic Latin art becomes blurred.

Poetry under this conception of its purpose is a highly concentrated reflective practice proper to a full appreciation of the nature of one's relation to the absolute. As we saw, Schlegel treats poetic expression as bound by and dependent upon historical context, so any such expression will provide an individualized perspective on the world within a historical context. This is also true of the interpretation of poetry; interpretation is an imaginative exercise that is likewise bound to and dependent upon historical context. Poetry is for Schlegel primarily a highly self-conscious form of communication, one that externalizes in an object the poet's self-understanding at any one time and place and puts that self-understanding before others for interpretation. But the activity of poetry is also a model—the model—of individual subjectivity, and, in particular, of the special sort of integrity Schlegel holds is indicative of highly reflective subjectivity. And so, to this extent, poetry is a form of *self*-communication. It is this first-person, historicized conception of poetry that provides the best point of departure for a discussion of Schlegel's conception of irony. It is in terms of this subjective approach to poetic meaning that one can, in turn, approach more third-person questions concerning ironic communication between subjects.

For Schlegel each individual subject experiences the world and itself under various categories. We are all situated in concrete forms of life that are constituted, constrained, and individuated by more or less coherent and reasonably stable stocks of beliefs, desires, feelings, moods, habits, and so forth. Such categories, Schlegel holds, tend towards univocity, both with regard to their internal content (e.g. the concept 'freedom' tends over time to reduce its number of senses to one core sense, in which process the others either disappear or come to strike one as merely analogical) and in terms of their relations to other categories (e.g. the concept 'freedom' achieves centrality by diminishing the importance of, say, the concept 'self-discipline' or by reinterpreting it by its own lights). That is to say, many of the categories gain what apparent normative traction they have in experience by regulating it. Schlegel holds that one will always find oneself under some such constraints. One could hardly do without certain core commitments to serve as the background conditions in terms of which things present themselves as significant. To that extent one must *affirm* the regularizing function of such categories, for they present constituent features of the conditions on having experience. Schlegel treats this affirmation as the first of two components of irony. If one reflects stringently enough on the relation between

one's finite subjectivity and the absolute, however, one realizes that no single rule (or set of rules) can so constitute one's subjectivity that it (or they) would define one. This is because, as we have discussed, the relation of the absolute to finite subjectivity structurally leaves so great a deal of latitude—*inestimably great*—that one would be misunderstanding human potential to consider oneself so constrained. This is not merely Whitman's ringing declaration that 'I contain multitudes';⁹⁶ it is the more radical claim that one *is* a multitude. What I *am* is the conjunction of the demand to 'progress' and the contingency of empirical circumstance—that is all. No stable set of perspectives on the world could exhaust the way the world might be meaningful to one; moreover, settling on one set makes it impossible to satisfy the mandate to be imaginatively open to romantic 'progression'. Schlegel claims on this basis that a critical appreciation of the ongoing integrity of the self requires continual *distancing* of oneself from rules. This distancing is the second element in irony. Although one cannot help but be beholden to customs and principles that give coherence to one's experience ('affirm' them in Schlegel's sense), one must be alive to both the constitutive force of changes in circumstance and the cognitive and conative plasticity of subjects to adapt and create anew. Taken as a whole, then, irony is an acute, circumspect awareness that one's own self always in principle outpaces given circumstance. Irony is, then, simultaneously an affirmation of and critical distancing from purported identity-constituting features of one's own concrete way of being.

Schlegel deploys different terms to designate these two components of irony. At times, he expresses the balance of the components of irony as a *tension* between them, and does so in three distinct ways. Perhaps the most famous characterization involves the idea that the ironist—one who embraces irony with clarity—'oscillates' (*schwebt*) between 'self-creation' (*Selbstschöpfung*) and 'self-annihilation' (*Selbstvernichtung*).⁹⁷ The self just is a self-understanding, a 'construct', so to speak, that has but relative stability. On the other hand, irony requires one to consider a self also as a process that requires distancing, which in turn exerts a destabilizing effect on fixed identity and thus on one's standing conception of oneself. A variant to this first way of contrasting the twin poles of irony that is even more explicitly indebted to Fichte adds to the two structural elements above a third, mediate term, 'self-limitation' (*Selbstbeschränkung*).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ 'Song of Myself' § 51, l. 9.

⁹⁷ AFr 51, KFSa 2: 172; see also LFr 43, 48, KFSa 2: 149, 153; AFr 51, KFSa 2: 172–3; PhL Beilage VI, KFSa 18: 538–47. One must 'rise above and destroy in [one's] thoughts what [one] adores'. 'Über Goethes Meister', KFSa 2: 131. 'Whatever does not annihilate itself is not free' PhL II.ii, 628, KFSa 18: 82.

⁹⁸ LFr 37, KFSa 2: 150.

It denotes the *effect* on the subject of holding the two prior elements together. Taking sustenance from one's present perspective on the world and at the same time holding oneself open, recognizing that there are other possibilities for the self, has the effect of reining in the tendency to always seek rest and self-satisfaction. The third way Schlegel expresses the same point is that irony allows 'intimation' (*Ahnung*) of the absolute.⁹⁹ In saying this, Schlegel recapitulates points we have already considered: a thing intimates something else when it exhibits features of its own that indicate the other thing. As common usage has it, intimation is not intimacy: it is not a mode of immediate access. In this case the feature that irony exhibits is a plurality of possible ways one might be, and what that intimates is the absolute, a source of such forms not exhausted by any one set of them.¹⁰⁰

Irony is not merely the formal structural feature of poetic works in virtue of which they incite and forward reflective construction; it is also Schlegel's account of the dialectical structure constitutive of *lived* subjectivity. One might accentuate the contingency of a form of life by contrasting it with others. One question concerns how concrete the idea of another form of life has to be in order for it to properly distance one from one's own present form. Logical or physical possibilities are too abstract to do the job; it is quite easy to admit such variants without thereby destabilizing at all one's adherence to one's own form of life. (Indeed, philosophers nowadays do this sort of thing all the time to settle better into given intuitions, and not to challenge them.) To answer this question, it is helpful to take a step back and broaden the framework somewhat. Schlegel is writing at a point in European intellectual history when there is widespread interest in matters that are recognizably 'anthropological' in the modern sense of the term. Modern European philosophical consideration of radically different cultures goes at least as far back as Montaigne, and if one allows for speculative forms of the same, back to Rabelais. What is new in anthropological speculation in Schlegel's time, however, is the developing idea of ethnography. The very methodology of studying societies and cultures is impacted by consideration of those foreign enough from one's own to raise pressing questions concerning social-scientific intelligibility, and it is easy to see a similarity between this effect and Schlegel's ironic 'distancing'. That said,

⁹⁹ I 69, KFSa 2: 263.

¹⁰⁰ It is perhaps worth mentioning that there is no analytic or necessary connection of the idea of (1) a present absence to (2) possibility, i.e. what is not actual. Many actual things have possible states, other states that they might be in, other properties they might have, etc. The idea is rather that imaginative shift and sifting of possibilities is a sign for the absolute in its present-absent/absent-present nature. It is an indirect way to refer to the absolute, not a metaphysical substitute for the referent.

one risks anachronism in characterizing late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century views like those of Herder and Schlegel when it comes to this issue. Due to the increased sensitivity to the problem of illegitimately importing one's social understanding into other social contexts that followed the work of E. E. Evans-Prichard, Clifford Geertz, and others, coupled with the ascendancy of functionalism in twentieth-century ethnography, which treats the social significance of parts of societies as dependent upon the social whole, today there is a tendency to overstate the epistemic barriers to investigating, interpreting, or even identifying a form of life sufficiently different from one's own to be worthy of the name. The dawning interest in the methodology of the social sciences and its connection with hermeneutics did not pose such daunting obstacles for Schlegel's conception of what it is to acknowledge other forms of life as impinging on one's sense of the fixity of one's own. Schlegel assumes that there will be enough contiguity and overlap of forms of life in most cases for them to be contrasted with one another.

What consideration of alternatives relative to a 'home' form of life *would* sufficiently draw one out of one's absorption in it to create the distance necessary for irony? Much depends on how different the contrasting form of life is and how comprehensive it is. Where variance in perspective is slight and does not call for significant cognitive or practical adjustment, the contemplation of the possibility of perspectives different from one's own is not very difficult or productive. They seem all too trivially 'possible'; one indeed might easily forage one's own culture and find any number of such differences among *individuals*. Up until this point, we have explicated Schlegel's conception of irony by emphasizing the ironic potential of the idea of a plurality of forms of life—that is, perspectives on the world that are shared among their adherents. This captures Schlegel's concern to understand historically and culturally remote other ways of life, on the level of whole societies or cultures, as impacting one's understanding of the relation of one's own form of life to the absolute. To the extent that the form of life in which one is situated is important to one's self-understanding, this sort of ironic activity will have impact at the individual subjective level. Schlegel's main philosophical work often gives the impression that his primary focus is not on issues of comprehension at the 'whole-social' level, i.e. between differing schemes whose content is distributed among individuals. Rather, his concerns seem mostly to have to do with the application of this structure of irony at the level of individual subjects, where one of the questions is how whole-social frameworks arise in the first place out of individuals' overlapping interpretation of others' perspectives. Many qualities characterize human beings generically, but each individual human being has a way things are for her that expresses her

unique personal history, emotional makeup, aesthetic sensibility, and so forth. Schlegel is, accordingly, more given to issues of what it is like to be a subject at the high pitch of one's subjectivity—in what it is like to be an *ironic subject* and one among other such subjects. Accordingly, appropriately ironic consideration of the possibility or actuality of relevantly different points of view will require both that one take one's own commitments seriously enough to bother with the contrast in the first place and also those of others challenging enough to make the contrast substantive and potentially dislodging.

One can aspire to understand what it is like for someone else (or for oneself considered as someone else) to have a kind of experience from the 'inside out' by entering into the point of view constitutive of the experience in question.¹⁰¹ Instead of a *post hoc* description of what might seem to one like the experience in question from the outside, one places oneself in the position of the other subject so as to see *how* it makes sense to hold things to be meaningful in that other way. Entering into another's perspective may strike one as a rampant idealization that borders on empathy, and Schlegel seems at times to treat entering into another's perspective in just this way: as if it were possible, so to speak, to cloak oneself entirely in another's subjectivity. But this way of thinking is in tension with other things he says about the singularity of individual experience. His best line of attack is to allow for incremental but incomplete sharing of perspectives. One begins pre-ironically with a certain level of affirmation of one's own point of view on things; it is felt to be binding upon one in certain ways, with a certain intensity, and with certain further consequences. One then takes seriously another perspective, made available to one by communication with another for whom the perspective in question is native. The degree to which one enters into another's point of view in order to understand how it would be binding on that other subject will affect the intensity with which it will be felt to be an adjunct to, a competitor with, or a usurper of the view one started out from. One might end up reaffirming one's pre-ironic view, but that reaffirmation would only be as good, as 'critical', as the seriousness with which one had entered the other viewpoint. One might, alternatively, integrate into one's pre-ironic view elements of the view into which one entered imaginatively. Or, at the limit, one might reject even core components of one's pre-ironic view in favor of the competing scheme. Schlegel's claim is, then, that the ironist holds her views out for constant criticism—that is just what 'holding a view' amounts to for her. Without this there is merely uncritical affirmation and a facile and phony owning up to what it means for those views to be one's own. This is just to put in short form a point that bears

¹⁰¹ AFr 121, KFSa 2: 184–5.

emphasizing: the two elements in irony are *dialectically* related to one another,¹⁰² and something well short of 'going native' does the necessary dialectical work. What one wants is an imaginative transaction with other ways of thinking sufficient to reveal them as trenchant alternatives that achieves the balance of the two ironic elements.¹⁰³

This is where ironic poetry reenters the discussion. It does so in two ways. First, Schlegel conceives of poetry as a means through which one can imaginatively enter into another form of life in a substantial way that nevertheless does not require that one live in the world in terms of that form of life. Second, poetry is a form of *communication* that helps one realize the truth about one's relation to the absolute. The constitutive conceptual indeterminacy of art makes it exemplary of the indeterminacy of one's attempts to represent one's relation to the absolute. The artist adumbrates the absolute by producing a work full of connotation that attracts and rewards renewed interpretation.¹⁰⁴ The artwork for Schlegel, accordingly, is a *process* through which interpretation is expressed and furthered. Art expresses the absolute by presenting the richness of the world seen from the perspective of the artist; the work's indeterminacy solicits interpretation by means of critical responsiveness to it (including the artist's own self-critique). This is one meaning of the 'incomprehensibility' (*Unverständlichkeit*) that Schlegel

¹⁰² If one were to push matters, one might think, as it appears that Nietzsche sometimes did, that the thoroughgoing perspectivist will attempt to enter as many other ways of thinking as she can, developing and adopting other points of view and incorporating them into her own perspective where possible. The more perspectives one occupies, the more ways one has available to take the world and adumbrate the absolute. Cf. Bataille's conception of transgression and Foucault's advocacy of it. See *Dits et écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), I: 233–50. Foucault does seem to track the quality of tension inherent in romantic irony when he says that transgression neither denies existing values or limits nor affirms new ones. Rather, it is an activity through which one realizes there is no transcendent meaning; the result of the activity is an affirmation of the activity itself. There are similarities as well to Paul Feyerabend's idea of conceptual proliferation. See *Against Method*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1988). For Schlegel, by contrast, 'entertaining' perspectives need not involve practicing them, nor does it require that we react positively to what is entertained. I can benefit from seeing things as Oblomov does and still want to get out of bed.

¹⁰³ It is interesting to consider the workings of romantic imagination here against the background offered in Nagel's famous 'bat consciousness' example. Part of the proof of the ineliminability of subjectivity is an argument that one cannot experience 'what it is like to be a bat' on account of the great difference between human and chiropteran consciousness. This is so even if one allowed that the human brain could gradually mutate into a bat brain. See Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 165–80. The better strand in Schlegel embraces this thought and applies it to human intersubjectivity. The slightly empathic (and philosophically weaker) element in Schlegel's thought stops short of sharing points of view or perspectives. It is rather a form of sharing through an overlap of reconstructions of such points of view.

¹⁰⁴ See AFr 111, 116, KFSa 2: 181, 182–3; cf. AFr 125, KFSa 2: 185–6; I 129a, 136, KFSa 2: 269 n. 1, 270.

insists is a positive characteristic of works. His claim is not that poetry, or art more generally, should be nonsensical.¹⁰⁵ It is rather that its meaning cannot be comprehensively understood.

E. Poetic philosophy and sociality: symphilosophieren

Just as poetry and philosophy are optimally interchangeable,¹⁰⁶ criticism is supposed to be 'poetic'.¹⁰⁷ This means not only that criticism should involve the creative use of imagination, but also that it is no more final and determinate than the artwork that it takes as its object. First, criticism does not determine its critical object; it should not and, indeed, cannot impose a definitive understanding upon the work. But, second, one critical interpretation always can be the object for further criticism. That is, criticism is neither *determining* nor *determinate*. Moreover, because 'poetry' for Schlegel is an umbrella concept containing under it 'lyric', 'epic', 'novel', 'painting', 'music', and, crucially, 'philosophy', to say that criticism must be poetic is also to say that it must be philosophical. For these reasons Schlegel insists that reader and writer 'enter into the sacred relationship of deepest *Symphilosophie* or *Sympoesie*'.¹⁰⁸ The idea that poetry solicits intervention by other perspectives in the form of active readers (viz. critics) is closely tied to the claim, already discussed, that perspectives are both partial *to* a set of commitments and partial expressions *of* the absolute. All poetry is conceptually indeterminate enough to advertise its interpretative incompleteness, if not in itself then under the pressure of ironic criticism.

Ironic incompleteness, which explicitly confronts the audience with ambiguity, ambivalence, or conceptual tension present in irony, solicits interpretation of the work, almost under the aspect of an aesthetic demand, not for the ultimate aim of

¹⁰⁵ KFSa 2: 363–71. The essay 'Über die Unverständlichkeit' appears late in the run of the journal *Athenäum* as almost a valedictory. In it Schlegel responds, in a sense, to the widespread criticism that the contents of the journal were incomprehensible by reasserting incomprehensibility as a criterion for success of the contents of the journal. Part of irony is exclusion of those not subtle enough to 'get it', so that incomprehension of the content would be a result and sign of irony. But it is also the case, as Schlegel makes clear in the essay (see KFSa 2: 370), that even the writers of the contents of the journal don't 'get it' all and, to that extent, incomprehension is their lot as well.

¹⁰⁶ Schlegel maintains throughout his writings that poetry and philosophy are different activities (LFr 42, KFSa 2: 152), as are poetry and science: 'Taken strictly the idea of a scientific poetry is just as laughable as that of a poetic science' (LFr 61, KFSa 2: 154). But he also stresses that one needs to move beyond the 'strict' idea of separation between the two forms of writing and thinking. He writes in this vein that '[t]he entire history of modern poetry is a continuing commentary on the following short philosophical text: all art should become science and all science art. Poetry and philosophy should be united' (LFr 115, KFSa 2: 161).

¹⁰⁷ LFr 61, 115, 117, KFSa 2: 154, 161–2; see also AFr 44, 67, 249, 304, KFSa 2: 172, 175, 207, 216; cf. AFr 116, KFSa 2: 183.

¹⁰⁸ LFr 112, KFSa 2: 161; cf. *Blütenstaub* 15, 20; KFSa 2: 164.

a convergence in taste but rather for plural interpretative engagement with the work. This interpretative activity on the part of the audience is participatory, Schlegel holds, and is thus not a passive response to the work—‘getting it’, as it were—but an active one nearly on a par with the original creation of the work. One can therefore say that interpretations, at least sufficiently imaginative ones, supplement works: thus Schlegel writes that the poet ‘constructs’ a reader who, in turn, ‘fills out’ the poem by interpretation of it.¹⁰⁹ The artist creates the work by exercising her ironic subjectivity: she understands things to be meaningful in certain ways albeit with engrained tentativeness. That requires, as we have seen, a complex use of imagination in simultaneously affirming and distancing herself from her point of view as an artist on her chosen material. The audience likewise takes up the work imaginatively, probing it by interpreting it in a way that is itself ironic, which means both holding the work at a critical distance and at the same time putting oneself inside its perspective. No work will be made complete by the intentions of the artist, the interpretation of its audience, or both in conjunction. This incompleteness does not hinder criticism; it fosters it. Works are no more or less than foci for interpretations that are themselves poetic and thus invite further interpretation, allowing for potentially infinitely many nested iterations of perspectival subjectivity. Schlegel holds that activity like this is the basis for community in which highly individualized subjects create their sense of belonging together, not with reference to laws that are antecedently viewed as making claims upon them all, but through processes of interpretive exchange in which they solicit imaginative exercises from one another.¹¹⁰ The degree of interpretive overlap, the degree to which such exercises are grasped as meaningful and are taken up as one’s own, is contingent and this contingency is what determines the social features, ethical and otherwise, that bind communities and make them distinctive.

It is worthwhile to amplify this last point. One key feature of this view of sociality is the way subjectivity *qua* irony tempers what one might call the impulse to seek equipoise in law. It is typical of some philosophers, and most philosophers of this period, to feature analyses of the necessity of moral or social laws, where the necessity in question is modeled on natural law (Kant) or rational convergence (Hegel). The romantic conception of community runs counter to this idealist tradition. Interpretive overlap for Schlegel is a matter of brokering two things: (1) one’s current sense of what matters to one individually (which of course may be the result of socially inculcated features at any one time), towards

¹⁰⁹ AFr 112, KFSa 2: 161.

¹¹⁰ AFr 125, KFSa 2: 185–6; I 44, KFSa 2: 260.

which one holds reciprocating attitudes of affirming and distancing, and (2) another's subjective view, which is the product of a similar ironic activity recognized as such by the interpreter. The overlap, then, is decidedly not a necessary convergence (through argumentation or otherwise) that settles what normative structures will apply come what may. Indeed, one might hesitate even to deploy the term 'normative' here, given its current usage, which often assumes the importance of the relation of laws to selves that Schlegel rejects.¹¹¹ Any common social structure is a product of ironic overlap, and the degree of overlap depends on many unpredictable, contingent matters. There is an anarchic bent to this way of thinking about human sociality, so it is no surprise that Schlegel tends to stress tight-knit, local communities as paradigms of this intense sort of social understanding. We shall address in the course of chapter two idealist responses to this view on sociality, and, in particular, Hegel's and more extended claims that ironic reciprocity cannot be true reciprocity because either conceptually incoherent or pragmatically implausible.

F. *Back to Novalis*

Discussion of issues of the social philosophy of romanticism as Schlegel understands it quite naturally brings one back to the relationship of the two most important early German romantics, Schlegel and Novalis, who co-authored numerous texts and lived together for a time in something like an experimental community according to romantic precepts. Their minds became one to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to tell who wrote what. This is no great surprise, since one of the indicia of the sort of commonality that *sympphilosophieren* is claimed to produce is an affirmative yet distanced like-mindedness on philosophical doctrine. I have argued in this chapter that, when one turns away from textual critique of Fichte to the positive, more concrete account of how lived subjectivity relates to the absolute, Schlegel takes precedence over Novalis. I hope

¹¹¹ The same might be said for the aptness of the concept of autonomy to Schlegel or Novalis. Such ascription is routine in the literature, but the use is typically vague. If autonomy consists in identifying with a law, even a self-given one, the romantics are not theorists of autonomy. One might wish to travel a middle road by saying that the autonomy in question is a rather radical one, including within its ambit the freedom to break a law, or better, break a law just because it is self-given. Cf. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* § 58, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff), 3: 422. But now the sense of 'law' becomes Pickwickian. The nature of thought for Schlegel is to be creative. Binding oneself to a norm for a time might provide a basis for creativity that would be otherwise lacking (i.e. on the order of operating ingeniously within a poetic form, e.g. a sestina). And in that qualified sense, one might view Jena romanticism to be compatible with, and even invite, autonomy, so long as the romantic realizes that no instance of taking a norm to be authoritative is ultimately expressive of one's identity. Nonetheless, I prefer not to speak of autonomy in connection with the romantics.

to have shown that Schlegel has a rich account of this lived relationship, but I have not up to now compared Schlegel's trifurcate structure of *Wechselerweis*, global regulativism, and irony to any doctrine of Novalis' that limns this experiential aspect of romanticism. Now that *Symphilosophie* has been raised both as an account of the social philosophy of romanticism and as its intended organ of dissemination, it is time to return to Novalis and discuss the two main procedures he specifies as having existential impacts.

Let's focus first on the concept of 'romanticizing' (*Romantizieren*). Novalis famously enjoins that '[t]he world must be romanticized'.¹¹² Romanticizing is a procedure with two aspects, much as irony has two dimensions, each aspect corresponding to one element in what Novalis thinks is the essential tension inherent in living life under conditions of the absolute. On the one hand, the philosopher-poet makes what is ordinary appear extraordinary, even supernatural. This requires one to treat the commonplace elements of the world as only problematically given, by showing what they 'are not'. In order to accomplish this, the poet dislodges objects from customary contexts that give them the air of normality, translating them into foreign contexts that render them strange.¹¹³ On the other hand, romanticizing also involves treating the infinite, mysterious, or extraordinary as ordinary. This practice accounts for the abundance of supernatural effects that are treated as if they were natural regularities in Novalis' fiction, giving those texts an uncanny (*unheimlich*) character—an aspect of the out-of-kilter status of law as a kind of weird fate—typical of Kleist's and E. T. A. Hoffmann's works. I provide an extended treatment of Novalis' deployment of the idea of romanticization in his own fiction in the Appendix, but the aesthetic effect of something like it can be gleaned from a short passage from Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*:

But the lake at our feet was plain, clear water, bottomed with smooth stones of simple mud. It was quick with small life, like any pond, as modest in its transformations of the ordinary as any puddle. Only the calm persistence with which the water touched, and touched, and touched, sifting all the little stones, jet, and white, and hazel, forced us to remember that the lake was vast, and in league with the moon (for no sublunar account could be made of its shimmering, cold life).¹¹⁴

The writing here is so perfectly weighted to its intended effect that no brief discussion can help but be coarse. Nonetheless, it is possible to give a sense of

¹¹² FS I.37, NS 2: 384.

¹¹³ One might see in this a historical antecedent to Brecht's 'alienation-effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*) or to Russian Formalist 'estrangement' (остранения).

¹¹⁴ (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), p. 112.

how romanticization is one way to understand its structure. Throughout the passage, Robinson balances the mundane with the extramundane. Extramundane forces are present in the mundane, like the water that is the subject of the passage, shifting emphasis to the extramundane within the mundane: 'modest transformations' of 'plain, clear water', 'puddles', 'ponds', and 'simple mud' invoke celestial processes (e.g. the moon's phases and their influence on tide, which then moves stones, smoothing them by endless but unseen friction on the lakebed). On the other hand, the extraordinary—the moonlight, the 'quick' of life, the vastness of a body of water at night—are embedded in the muted luminosity of the 'little stones, jet, and white, and hazel', the 'small life', the clarity of the lake surface. All of this consummates memory of that balanced interpenetration, that is, brings the girl protagonists into a state of self-awareness on that basis.

Combining the two aspects of romanticizing—making the ordinary extraordinary and the extraordinary ordinary—imposes upon the poet-philosopher the task of inverting the conventional priority given to the value of fixity in experience. The procedure imparts a visionary quality to all vision, indeed to all experience. If one performs these imaginative operations and admits them as broadly constitutive of experience, as Novalis advocates, this could very well disorient one and jostle one's sense of security in a given mode of thought, similar to the intended result of the mechanism of irony in Schlegel. Of course the metaphysical point remains: romanticizing is but a circumspect way of expressing the elusive absolute by proliferating possible representations that run contrary to the sense of stability one might have in the ordinary run of life.

The second device we shall consider also involves inversion, but this time rather more explicitly. This is Novalis' doctrine of the *ordo inversus*, also a procedure for generating the appropriate philosophical attitude toward basic discursive constraints, given the relative nature of such constraints vis-à-vis the absolute.¹¹⁵ The purpose of this procedure is to model the nature of discursive constraints basic to a domain of experience as but relative to a discursively elusive absolute. On its face *ordo inversus* is a less straightforward analog to irony than is the idea of romanticizing; still, *ordo inversus* has a bifurcated dialectical structure involving concepts of identification and distance, which is analogous with the structure of irony as Schlegel understands it. As we have seen, Novalis holds that the only way that discursive beings can model the absolute is conditioned by the relation of the finite to the absolute, which is mediate. This raises the question of what sort of 'correction' can be applied at the level of reflection to best capture the relation of basic discursive constraints in terms of the absolute. Because one must

¹¹⁵ See FS I.32, 36, 44, 65, NS 2: 126–7, 128, 133–4, 142–3.

avoid at all costs the idea that basic conceptual constraints emerge from the absolute in ways that one can track discursively, Novalis intends the *ordo inversus* to be an *indirect* discursive procedure that models the basic discursive categories, in their discursivity, under the controlling idea that they stem from a non-discursive source. To do this Novalis deploys a visual analogy. The Latin verb ‘*inverto*’ on which ‘*inversus*’ is based has several related meanings. Most basically, it can mean to reverse something by turning it upside down, inside out, or by sending it back from whence it came. But the ordinary meaning of the term also extends to ‘upsetting something’ (e.g. by reversing its direction or by overturning it) or ‘changing something into its opposite’. The root verb also has the linguistic senses of ‘translate’ and, perhaps most tellingly in comparison with irony, ‘mean the opposite of what one is saying’. Novalis’ Latin was excellent, and he had a developed taste for exploiting semantic multiplicity, but these senses of ‘*inversus*’, while certainly pertinent, are not as revealing as yet another, more specialized use of the word from the science of optics, where ‘inversion’ refers to mirror-imaging. When one looks in a mirror one sees oneself represented in a way that tempts the thought that what is in the mirror is visually identical to what stands before the mirror. But even a child can tell that images in a plane mirror are not visually identical to what they represent. A mirror image of a thing is reversed left to right: if one were wearing a watch on one’s left wrist, that watch would be imaged back to one looking in the mirror as on one’s right wrist. (The explanation for why this is so, and for why inversion is also not from top to bottom, is unsettled but unimportant for present purposes.)¹¹⁶ Mirrors present inverted images of what they represent. Novalis’ idea is that this applies to the concepts of representation and judgment. The idea that representation or judgment is ontologically basic is but an artifact of representation or judgment itself—an image of itself in its own mirror—and is, thus, an inversion. It is a brilliant conceit; *ordo inversus* requires one to see the investigation of the root of representation as always producing

¹¹⁶ I believe it is agreed that part of the explanation is a psychological transposition that humans seem not to be able to help making. We characteristically think of things mirrored as, so to speak, having gone behind the mirror and appearing *through* it. If we resist this cognitive effect of perception we come to see that the seeming inversion from left to right is dependent upon a prior inversion (introduced by us) of back to front. This part of a solution to the mirror-inversion problem coheres well with Novalis’ analogical use of it: there is no way for representation, so to speak, to walk behind the mirror in order to appear through it in a way that is not inverted. It is interesting to think of these problems in connection with the visual examples Kant uses in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique* to illustrate the unavoidability of dialectical illusion. KrV A 297/B 353–4. See Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Dialectical Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) for sophisticated discussions.

representation-produced artifacts, inversions of the first article, not something independent of it. This is the first aspect of *ordo inversus*, what one might call its 'diagnostic' stage. But *ordo inversus* also has a second, 'constructive' stage in which the inversion itself is inverted. This does not 'correct' the inversion back to an original form that is non-representational; rather, it makes inversion itself thematic, self-consciously nesting the first inversion in a further one to which it is necessarily related. To mirror a mirror-image is not to have a non-mirrored image; it is to have an image twice-mirrored. The moral is that extrapolation of even base representational constraints from the absolute is an illusion, one that encourages the idea that some sort of *Ur*-representation must be a ground for representation. But, the more one attempts to represent basic subjectivity, the more one heaps representation upon representation—something that one is fated to do, yet, at the same time, something about which one must be exceedingly circumspect.¹¹⁷

Why philosophically favor Schlegel's tripartite model to Novalis' duo of romanticizing and *ordo inversus*? Both methodologies aim to bring home in as vital a way as is possible for discursive beings the relation between the absolute and reflection by requiring that subjects think of that relation in terms of a simultaneous distancing and identification. Both regimens are dialectical—their components are mutually dependent and are in dynamic reciprocal interchange with one another. Moreover, both Schlegel and Novalis key their structures to promote 'progress' in the technical romantic sense of the term. Notwithstanding these commonalities, Schlegel's schema has advantages over Novalis'. The first of these has to do with the way it radicalizes source material from idealism—in the case of regulative reason, Kant, and in the case of the *Wechselerweis*, Fichte—in order to undercut idealism itself. This provocative and polemic tendency is much clearer in Schlegel than in Novalis. As we have observed, this can give the impression that, for all his criticism of Fichte, Novalis is still overly attracted to the idea of intellectual intuition. Schlegel is clearly not tempted in this

¹¹⁷ There is yet a third candidate for the base term in the analogy with inversion. Might Novalis also mean to call on the idea of inversion in logic? An inverse is defined as the contrapositive of the converse of a conditional. So, for example, the conditional 'if *not-p*, then *not-q*' is the inverse of the conditional 'if *p*, then *q*'. To follow Novalis' lead, inverting an inverse restores the original conditional: the conditional 'if *not-not-p*, then *not-not-q*' is formally equivalent to the conditional 'if *p*, then *q*'. Now, one might think that this equivalence spoils the analogy: as if inverting the inverse did instantiate the absolute. But that needn't be the case: the logical point surely remains that one cannot infer the inverse of a conditional from the conditional. Still, I am uncertain that Novalis alludes to logical inversion in his description of the *ordo inversus*. But the thought is enticing, especially given that Novalis (following Fichte) routinely analyzes relative identity as a form of conditional judgment.

direction.¹¹⁸ This means that, for the purpose of isolating what is uniquely important about romanticism in strict contrast to idealism, Schlegel is a better representative of the Jena circle of thinkers. Second, there is a very important connection to idealism that can go missing in Novalis, but not in Schlegel as we have interpreted him. That is the attraction of a stringent form of Kantianism—one almost wants to say a kind of Kantianism brokered *per impossibile* by Jacobi.¹¹⁹ This comes out most clearly in Schlegel's global regulativism—a position that is also present in some of Novalis' work, but not at front and center as it is in Schlegel. Schlegel's unmistakable openness to historical contingency and the impact of concrete empirical experience on what can count as normative structures (and one's reflective relation to their degree of invariability) render Schlegel a much better contrast to the main form of German idealism after Fichte, i.e. Hegel. Hegel knew this well—there is scant mention of Novalis in his work. Third, the concept of irony is inherently social; the concept of an audience is analytic to that of irony. Irony on this count can claim to provide stronger connection to social theory through modern hermeneutical practices than can any of Novalis' doctrines. Novalis' main work in social thought, the nostalgic *Christianity, or Europe* (1799), only strengthens the case for Schlegel's superiority in this regard.

A final point concerning irony also recommends it over any of Novalis' conceptual routines: its role in romantic systematics. This aspect of Schlegel's thought is especially challenging to present clearly, but once clarity takes hold is most impressive.

G. Fragments and ironic systematicity

Ironic works both are self-consciously aware of their incompleteness and seek to make others aware of that incompleteness. Schlegel holds that there is a device uniquely suited to express the ineliminable tension in endorsing a view in the face of its perspectival nature. Such a device serves three key functions. First, it reflects the tension in a theoretically explicit way; the tension is 'mapped onto' structural elements of the mode of expression. Second, the device is 'poetic' in the sense we have been discussing: it solicits further interpretation and holds itself out as a

¹¹⁸ Schlegel sometimes does speak of intellectual intuition in positive terms, for instance when he says that it is the 'categorical imperative of any theory' (AFr 76, KFSA 2: 176). But there is a way to read this analogy to the role of a categorical imperative in Kant that is consistent with the limitation of intellectual intuition to a regulative role. Schlegel here is focusing on the conjunction of the demand levied on the romantic subject by the idea of unmediated access to the absolute on the one hand with the absolute's cognitive unavailability on the other.

¹¹⁹ See Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. D. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 77–9.

candidate for being nested in an elaborate network of potentially unending criticism. Third, more than merely displaying the tension inherent in the ironic conception of subjectivity, the device makes it clear that it too is subject to the tension. The device in question must be amply coherent and translatable across individual points of view, but open-ended enough to make clear that none is exhaustive.

The device in question is the *fragment*. One can think of literary fragments or fragmentary writing in any number of ways, for there are historically various conceptions of fragmentary writing and the purposes served by its products. One might think of fragments as remnants, for instance as broken-off pieces of things that were once whole: a shard of a black-figure *lekythos* or a pre-Socratic philosophical text. These items are not meant to be fragments; they are made fragmentary by the neglect of time or by other contingencies outside the control of their makers or their audiences. Schlegel was not above styling some of his writings as if they were 'found' fragments. Indeed, one might extend the idea and say it is part of his notion of fragments generally that they present themselves as implicitly tensed in the future perfect, i.e. that a fragment be written in a way that, in the present reading of it, gives the sense of its being discovered in the future as an ancient utterance, the understanding of which requires deep and sustained interpretation. That he so *styled* them gives away that irony is at play. Notwithstanding Schlegel's deep interest in the ancient world and in ancient rhetoric, a source closer to Schlegel's practice and theory of fragments is the French aphoristic tradition, in particular the great maxim writers like La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues, Pascal, and Chamfort.¹²⁰ Schlegel's conception of the fragment, however, departs substantially from this tradition of aphoristic practice; he requires that fragments precisely *not* be mere aphorisms in order to have their full effect. Aphorisms are typically self-contained, polished, and rounded thoughts presented in a condensed form. They express a truth to the reader by means of a surprising turn of language. Moreover, an aphorism's effect often also crucially depends on the reader being able to acknowledge through reading a truth that she already holds. Aphorisms are neither arguments nor everyday conversation; they are exercises in wit, and the operation of wit requires a shared background of belief and sentiment. Some of Schlegel's fragments are aphoristic (for instance: 'going to press is to thinking like the nursery is to one's first kiss'), but examples like this are surprisingly rare.¹²¹ Still others raise expectations in the

¹²⁰ The latter is especially important for Schlegel. See LFr 111, KFSA 2: 161; see also Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, pp. 151–2.

¹²¹ AFr 62, KFSA 2: 174.

reader that she is reading an aphorism, only to then withhold the satisfaction typical of reading aphorisms as part of the effect of the fragment. Most prevalent however are short statements that, by the light of even middling aphoristic wit, strike one as dull, declamatory, and cumbersome.

That Schlegel's fragments are not *salon*-ready exercises of crystalline wit is a calculated result with philosophical purpose. What the dashed expectation of aphoristic completeness and flashiness leads to, Schlegel hopes, is an impetus to seek a broader context of meaning of any one fragment in terms of others, just as a single pottery shard might be commonplace in itself yet harbor great meaning in a broader archaeological context. A reader's reaction might be boredom or consternation, of course; deferred pleasure is not for everyone, especially not if, as Schlegel thinks, the deferral in question is 'infinite'. But Schlegel is not writing for just anyone. As is the case with philosophers like Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, he is addressing a select audience whose relevant primary qualities are that it is on the verge of being able to appreciate this difficult, agitating pleasure and that it is willing to give more of the same in return. In other words, fragments are artistic-philosophical products that explicitly register views from a perspective and that initiate *symphilosophieren* and its correlative sense of community as their intended effects. They are, to recall some terminology we have already discussed in Schlegel's theory of irony, the most highly pitched species of *poetry*. Schlegel published three major groups of such fragments: the *Critical* (sometimes known as the *Lyceum*) *Fragments* (1797), the *Athenaeum Fragments* (1798), and the *Ideas* (1800).

Before pressing on to discuss the philosophical significance of fragments for Schlegel, it is necessary, as it was with several other concepts that he repurposes to his own aims, to try to grasp the extension of the term 'fragment'. Schlegel uses the term to denote both a particular sort of literary and philosophical writing and a property that other types of writing might have, e.g. essays, plays, novels, dialogues, lectures, and even philosophical systems.¹²² Schlegel was eager to praise contemporary writers such as Tieck and Jean Paul for their fragmentary works, in which effects such as *parabasis* were put in the service of irony,¹²³ but

¹²² AFr 259, KFSa 2: 209. Dialogues are 'chains or garlands of fragments', and an exchange of letters has a similar status (AFr 77, KFSa 2: 176).

¹²³ 'Irony is permanent parabasis' (PhL I.ii, 668, KFSa 18: 85). *Παράβασις* is a convention in Old Comedy in which the chorus steps forward and addresses the audience in the poet's name. A canonical ancient case is *Clouds* I.ii, but there are others, both extant and attested. An example taken from German romanticism would be Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater* (1797), where the members in the audience are supposed to become characters in the play (this reverses the direction of address typical of ancient *parabasis*). Perhaps the high point of the use of this device within the romantic movement is Clemens Brentano's novel *Godwi* (1801), where the characters finish the book for the narrator, who has died (i.e. earlier in the book).

he also deemed the work of authors as diverse as Goethe (especially *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*),¹²⁴ Diderot, Sterne, and Cervantes fragmentary, and even systematic thinkers like Leibniz and Plato compose fragments. The connection of modern thought with fragmentary means of expression is close for Schlegel, so close that he sometimes simply identifies being fragmentary with being modern. Nonetheless, he allows that ancient poetry too can become fragmentary, if only on account of its inclusion into a canon that also includes modern poetry.¹²⁵ Categorizing a piece of writing as a fragment, in this non-genre-specific sense, amounts to a formal way for Schlegel to say that a piece of writing is ironic. Schlegel deems his own fragments, however, an 'entirely new genre', and it is in

¹²⁴ Schlegel's understanding of the significance of Goethe would have to be the subject of independent treatment. His essay, 'Über Goethes *Meister*' (1798/1801), is often considered to be seminal in inaugurating modern German literary criticism. Schlegel's private and semi-private opinions on Goethe, expressed in letters and notebook entries of the time, are decidedly mixed. He is 'not universal', has 'merely the form of the universal' and is 'not romantic'. Statements such as these raise the question of why Schlegel so wholeheartedly approves of *Meister* in print, for instance at AFr 247, KFSa 2: 206, where he holds Goethe to be the most complete 'poetry of poetry'. The answer is that Schlegel sees latent in the book a 'tendency' that escapes Goethe, not the dawning of a new epoch realized in the execution of the novel. Cf. KFSa 2: 366, where Schlegel calls the late eighteenth century the 'Age of Tendencies'. The key *apperçu* is that *Meister* concerns 'Lehrjahre, in denen nichts gelernt wird, als zu existieren, nach reinen besonderen Grundsätzen oder seinen unabständlichen Natur zu leben' (KFSa 2: 141). Schlegel views Book I of the novel as a preparatory series of variations, each of which shows a side of Wilhelm's character that has potential for development. This theme of multifaceted receptivity to development is central for Schlegel. Schlegel is not as interested to explore Book II, where Wilhelm enters the world to which his development will conform after the failed courtship with Marianne. At this point in the essay Schlegel turns from narrative explication to poetics. He no doubt means this digression to mirror like interruptions in the novel itself, but the doctrine that is there treated—that the critic must both give herself over to the 'poet's effect' and distance herself analytically from it (KFSa 2: 137)—is obviously relevant to Schlegel's views on irony. In fact he credits the novel with forcing this irony on the critic, in part through its refusal to fit neatly into given critical categories (i.e. genres) and in part because of its refusal to put philosophical speeches in the mouths of its characters (unlike, say, *Werther*) (KFSa 2: 132). In best ironic and transcendental form, *Meister* is *sui generis* and thus self-critical—it judges itself (KFSa 2: 133–4). This sustains the obverse of Schlegel's requirement that, at the limit, the theory of the novel would have to be a novel itself, and one that requires an interlocutor for its completion (see 'Brief an der Roman', *Gespräch über die Poesie* [1799/1800], KFSa 2: 337). *Meister*'s overall form also reflects Schlegel's views on romantic systematicity: the whole of the novel achieves its totality without effacing the singularity of its parts. This view of the historical importance of Goethe—that he is the Moses of romanticism, at the brink but unable to enter its Promised Land—is consistent over Schlegel's critical writings. Thus, when he says in 'Versuch über den verschiedenen Styl in Goethes früheren und späteren Werken' (1800) that Goethe (especially *Faust* I) is the 'unification' (*Vereinigung*) of classical and romantic art, Schlegel does not mean that Goethe is more estimable than purely romantic poetry—that he was both a romantic and something beyond a romantic. It is rather that the unification in question stops short of full romanticism. See KFSa 2: 339–47.

¹²⁵ See AFr 24, KFSa 2: 169.

this genre-specific sense that being fragmentary raises the most interesting philosophical issues.¹²⁶

Schlegel ascribes to fragments two opposing properties that track the two structural features of irony, i.e. affirmation and distance. First, a fragment must be *complete*, a requirement that Schlegel glosses in terms of isolation from external connection: '[a] fragment, like a miniature work of art, must be wholly isolated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog [Igel]';¹²⁷ alternatively, it is 'a self-determined and self-determining thought'.¹²⁸ At the same time, a fragment belongs to a greater whole and thus, taken by itself, is *incomplete*. The affirmation in irony is best expressed in the aspect of a fragment that tends towards completion: the kind of self-contained, rounded-off aesthetic typical of aphorisms. The thought is that to affirm a statement is to treat it as more or less definitive, and that doing this comports with the assertive and definitive nature of 'complete' utterances. Following this train of thought, one might then correlate distance with incompleteness: a fragment's incompleteness is not just a neutral feature of it; rather, it indicates a missing piece of what is said and, to that extent, suggests more than it says. These two aspects of fragments taken together, understood as tracking the two components of irony, have a reciprocal structure, which Schlegel compares favorably to that of Leibniz's conception of the nature of substances.¹²⁹ Schlegel is not crystal clear about the terms of comparison, but he must intend that, just as any monad expresses the system of all other monads to the degree of its capacity to apperceive, a fragment in a collection of fragments might be taken to mirror in its implicit connotative structure the potential meanings of others.¹³⁰ Schlegel sometimes uses the term 'reciprocal saturation' (*Wechselsättigung*) to refer to such interpenetration of fragments, thereby bringing into close connection the vocabulary he uses to describe fragments with that he deploys to elucidate the sense of 'proof' relevant to romanticism. Any whole of which an individual fragment is a fragment is 'infinite', accordingly, in the two senses always pertinent for Schlegel: (A) 'infinite' because it is in principle beyond statement from a finite

¹²⁶ KFSa 24: 51. See also KFSa 2: 335, where Schlegel writes that 'romantic' does not denote a genre; it rather refers to an element of poetry that can be dominant or recessive but never wholly absent from any known genre. Perhaps the best way to put the point on behalf of Schlegel is that romantic poetry-philosophy is 'generic' in the sense that it *generates itself* as a genre.

¹²⁷ AFr 206, KFSa 2: 197.

¹²⁸ PhL II.i, 1333, KFSa 18: 305.

¹²⁹ See PhL I.ii, 237–314, KFSa 18: 42–9; see also I. 155–6, KFSa 2: 273–4.

¹³⁰ Appealing to Leibniz here is just an analogy; one should not put too much stock in it. (One crucial difference, of course, is that there is no God-like fragment according to Schlegel and, thus, no pre-established harmony between fragments that might be surveyed extra-systematically.) See AFr 276, KFSa 2: 213.

point of view and (B) 'infinite' because its surpassing of definitive statement within the system, coupled with the inherent human propensity to attempt to grasp the absolute, means that it will generate more and more interpretations of the absolute, thereby increasing the components, and therefore the density, of the system.¹³¹

Questions of categorization aside, the philosophical cash-value of the fragment is its relation to Schlegel's concept of systematicity. In one of his best-known and most-cited fragments Schlegel states that '[i]t is equally deadly for the spirit to have a system and to have none; it will have to decide to combine the two'.¹³² This might mean simply what we just considered. That is, the claim that one both have and not have a system and that, in response to that one must combine having and not having a system, could refer to the nature of single fragments according to Schlegel. Any fragment, taken by itself, is both a system and not a system. It is 'not a system' in the sense that it is presented as a fragment, as a part of some greater whole that can, because of its status as a part, only obliquely give an indication of the whole. A fragment is 'a system' in the sense that it also presents itself as a complete entity because of the way it focuses thought. The focus is two-fold. The fragment presents itself as something not easily understood and yet as something that attracts more thought because of this 'inconceivability'. Second, and the more metaphysical dimension that Schlegel appeals to in discussing the relation of fragments to monads, the fragment attracts thought by deepening it at every step of interpretation, opening up to thought through density of connotative relations it has with other fragments a potentially infinite interpretative experience. One might call this the 'intensive' conception of fragmentary systematicity. A faceted gem has both clarity and obliqueness, due to refraction. Thought is faceted for Schlegel and a fragment is a representational vehicle that best captures the oblique interconnection of any one thought with any other. But both having and not having a system also has an extensive dimension, one involving a system of fragments.¹³³ 'Having a system and not having one' involves, that is, a *kind of system* in which the elusiveness of the absolute is present as a formal, structuring principle. Such systems are open-ended and ever changing but, nonetheless, can claim their own kind of integrity.¹³⁴ Any system,

¹³¹ AFr 53, KFSa 2: 173.

¹³² AFr 53, FSKA 2: 173. Compare Novalis, FS VII.648, NS 2: 288–9 and Schlegel's insistence that 'the spirit of the system [is] something altogether different from the system' KFSa 23: 130. Here Schlegel makes reference to Fichte's conception of systematicity (i.e. *the system*), which he thinks expresses the necessary drive to systematic thought, but which 'falsely' concludes that systematicity is achievable.

¹³³ PhL Lii, 857, KFSa 18: 100; cf. KFSa 18: 485–6.

¹³⁴ AFr 85, KFSa 2: 178. See also Schlegel's statement that nothing in the 'poetical universe' stands still, i.e. that everything develops, changes, and is in movement. AFr 434, KFSa 2: 252.

even a nomologically modest one, must make assumptions if anything is to have some degree of fixity, and Schlegel is careful to allow that one cannot have a system that 'abstains from all decisions'.¹³⁵ But all fixity is relative to systematic assumptions, and all assumptions are defeasible in principle for him. Systems of fragments are also holistic: a constituent in the system is defined by all the relations that obtain between all constituents of the system at a certain state of it and nothing more or less: 'No idea is isolated. It is what it is only in combination with *all* other ideas'.¹³⁶ The system is nothing over and above the relations of its constituents; this is what Schlegel means when he says that systems move in a circle.¹³⁷ Schlegel's claim, then, that 'one must have and not have a system' does not mean that one just throws together fragmentary cognitive materials and let accident do the sorting. True, when gripped by polemics he can seem to endorse such an 'anything goes' approach,¹³⁸ but one should understand such statements as provocations meant to disturb easy and entrenched antecedent bars on what can count as the basic content and form of systems. The same overstatement we saw at work in Schlegel's considerations of the variability of norms and underdetermination is also in play in this context.

Let's now turn to the question of which relations obtain between fragments within a system of them. Connections that tend to fix meaning through strict determination might figure locally, but their widespread presence is discouraged. Systems of fragments essentially have as constituent parts objects for interpretations and indeed interpretations themselves, which by their very nature do not tend to determine their objects or other interpretations. That of course does not mean that there will be no tension within such a system; in fact, Schlegel intends systems of fragments to be able to tolerate a good deal more discord than purely conceptual systems, whose purposes of determining objects by theoretical means and strengthening explanatory coherence by reduction of laws to more basic ones they do not share.¹³⁹ In this spirit, Schlegel comments in a fragment from *Blütenstaub* that 'contradiction' in a system must remain unresolved.¹⁴⁰ One will get nowhere in understanding this claim if one thinks that Schlegel means by 'contradiction' logical contradiction; 'contradiction' here includes other forms of

¹³⁵ AFr 168, KFSa 2: 191; see also AFr 95, KFSa 2: 179.

¹³⁶ I 95, KFSa 2: 265.

¹³⁷ PhL Beilage II 16; KFSa 18: 518. Schlegel analogizes systems to epic poetry, the structure of which is mythical and cyclical.

¹³⁸ As when he extols 'grotesques', i.e. works that are disorganized and 'constructed in symmetrical arrangements of confusion', asserting that this sort of 'quasi-chaos' is 'very valuable' and will 'outlast a Gothic cathedral' (AFr 389, KFSa 2: 238).

¹³⁹ Cf. '[T]here is an infinite number of real definitions for every *individual*. One should propose, not prove' (AFr 82, KFSa 2: 177).

¹⁴⁰ *Blütenstaub* 26, KFSa 2: 164; see also AFr 412, KFSa 2: 243.

incompatibility between statements, sentences, utterances, and even beliefs and dispositions. The German word here, *Widerspruch*, can of course mean ‘contradiction’, in both the logical sense and less technical senses related to the logical sense, to mean a relation of opposition between items in which the truth of one rules out the truth of the other. But *Widerspruch* can mean something less demanding than this, where semantics takes a back seat to pragmatics.¹⁴¹ The word can also mean more generally asserting something in resistance to another thing, where one is not relying on strong claims about semantic incompatibility in taking the stand one does in opposition. Here the conflicting items might not be determinate enough to stand in the relation of logical contradiction, and they are not meant to be put in such a relation. Against the background of this more capacious understanding of contradiction, one can say that Schlegel intends at least two things. First, systems of fragments can house incomplete statements that stand in some tension with one another in what they *could imply* were they filled out in one way or another by interpretation. Under certain of their interpretations, two fragments might approach logical contradiction. But contradiction in the strict sense only obtains under conditions of determination of the contradictories; it is always possible to avoid contradiction by an equivocation in terms.¹⁴² But conditions of determination are only present ‘locally’ in a system of fragments, i.e. given a certain, limited set of interpretations of the constituent terms. The more one interprets, the more one is likely to move across the whole system of fragments and generate different interpretations of the fragments in question, seating them more and more in the whole fabric of possible interpretations, and this will tend to reduce the appearance of outright contradiction. In this way, a system of fragments again differs basically from a theory in standard form. In the former, a more global application of the system produces destabilization of fixed meaning by embedding elements more complexly in more possible interpretations, interpretations that, it is argued, proliferate the more one thinks about the possibilities. In the latter, however, it is the actual—what *is*, not what *is-not-yet*—that is crucial. Extending the resources of a theory over its terms determines them more and more: possibilities are reined in in favor of prediction, gauging expectation, and identifying ground or origin. These are neither objectionable nor optional features of a traditional theory, but they do not take the widest view of the relation of subjectivity to the absolute according to Schlegel.

¹⁴¹ Cf. the discussion of contradiction in Hegel, chapter two.

¹⁴² We shall return to this issue in chapter two, where we shall discuss Hegel’s and Schlegel’s rival conceptions of dialectic.

The second point Schlegel wishes to make by insisting that contradictions not be resolved in systems is connected with the first point, but is more explicitly dialectical. The presence of a contradiction in a theory is an irritant for the theory in a special way; when faced with a contradiction the theory will seek correction, adjusting terms so that the contradiction is no longer present. Kant is also in his own way a holist, as is clear from both the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique* and in the first and second Introductions to the third *Critique*. But the reaction of transcendental idealism to contradiction—its way of absorbing the irritant of contradiction—is perhaps best on display in the Antinomies. In some of them, the bald antithesis-and-thesis form presents what look to be contradictory metaphysical positions: if the antithesis is true then the thesis must be false and vice-versa. Kant's peculiar doctrine of transcendental idealism gifts him tools for coping with the contradiction: what was seemingly contradiction is actually contrariety or a failure to adequately specify background conditions for the meaning of the terms. In other words, resolution of contradiction brings forward and pointedly emphasizes powerful resources of the theory to transform what present themselves initially as rationally intractable problems into a set of questions that can be accommodated by new theoretical methodologies. Contradiction is not, then, merely an irritant to the theory; it is a *productive* irritant, at least with regard to some, telling contradictions. This point is of central importance to Hegel, as we shall see. Contradiction is also productive within a system of fragments; this is the second point to take from *Blütenstaub* passage. Unlike standard philosophical and scientific theories, in which determination of terms and strict lawlikeness are of the essence, systems of fragments do not respond to contradiction by attempting to purge themselves of it. To the contrary, systems of fragments, because systems of intentionally indeterminate parts, can accommodate more easily and without sacrificing integrity matter that looks initially to be contradictory. A system of fragments is not necessarily more systematic for containing more contradictions of this loose sort, but it accepts conceptual *tension* as a proper and, indeed, necessary part of systematicity. A system of fragments can allow contradiction *qua* tension to do its work, i.e. the work of making more dense the interpretative structure of the system. Such systems do not treat contradiction, that is, as posing a problem of coherence. Density will thereby be increased because, if extreme forms of cognitive tension between various fragments does not present itself as in need of solution (say, where one of the contradictories is exposed as cleanly false and jettisoned) more conceptual possibilities will remain. Systems of fragments, because they repudiate conditions of theoretical closure and modify their holism accordingly, allow contradiction to abide systematically—to work its way down skeptically into

the system at hand in order to advance it as radically as possible. Of course, as we have just discussed, idealist theories also deploy contradiction to the purpose of advancing theoretical purchase; Schlegel need not deny that. But idealist theories do so as a second order of business—expanding only when the recalcitrance of the world challenges them. Systems of fragments are dedicated to advancing interpretation *as such*; that is *all* they are for.

The connection with the doctrine of reciprocal proof is apparent, as when Schlegel writes that no system can be built out of epistemic or logical privilege, but rather must be constructed from *wechselseitige Sätze* in opposition but with equal ‘probity’.¹⁴³ In his *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy* and elsewhere Schlegel accentuates what he takes to be the close logical connections between Kantian antinomies, fragmentary systematicity, historicity, and reciprocal proof/reciprocal determination/reciprocal concepts (*Wechselbeweiß/Wechselbestimmung/Wechselbegriffe*).¹⁴⁴ Proper systems must reject a ‘false universality’ that dispenses with the systematic function of the difference of elements and put in the place of this a ‘true universality’, which preserves ‘what it is, *in diversity*, to its highest degree’.¹⁴⁵ Driving concepts and claims to their ‘extremes’ without antecedent gerrymandering will cause systematic disruption necessary to arrive at the ‘true middle’ where extremes are brought together without compromise.¹⁴⁶

H. Language, history, and expression

Schlegel’s views on historicity and cognitive limitation develop closely alongside his philosophy of language. In many ways, they constitute an analog to Novalis’ treatment of the linked categories of faith and feeling, for it is in his consideration of the constitutive function of language on experience that Schlegel comes closest to allowing what might appear to be a mode of immediate access to the absolute. In what follows, we shall see that this flirtation is just that, a passing attraction to the idea that language reposes in it remnants of reflectively undigested material stemming from the absolute, occasioned by Schlegel’s emphasis on the linguistic structure of thought. We shall see that Schlegel does not rule out the possibility that language is pre-discursive in some of its aspects, but conclude that experiential effects of this would have to be at least minimally discursive. This serves to

¹⁴³ PhL I.ii, 193, 343, KFSa 18: 36, 53; see also AFr 39, KFSa 2: 171; I 74, KFSa 2: 263.

¹⁴⁴ PhL II.ii, 1045, 1055; KFSa 18: 407, 408; PhL Beilage II 16, KFSa 18: 518; see also AFr 84, KFSa 2: 178; KFSa 18: 82.

¹⁴⁵ I 123, KFSa 2: 269 (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁶ I 74, KFSa 2: 263. See also LFr 103, KFSa 2: 159, where Schlegel states that the ‘coherence’ of a work—where what measures coherence is a set number of final ends—is not unity but the ‘semblance’ (*Schein*) thereof.

extend the analysis of the connotative power of ‘poetry’ in Schlegel’s special sense of the term, as well as the pseudo-Leibnizian way he can at times speak of fragments.

Schlegel was a pioneer in European philosophy of language—a historical status that is more appreciated now than it once was.¹⁴⁷ Establishing his views on language during the Jena period is a complex matter. Many of them are pendent to his views on the development of classical poetry and are not developed in an independent systematic context of their own. Even more challenging is a certain temptation to read back into this earlier period the striking views Schlegel develops after his move from Jena to Paris, where he takes up the study of Sanskrit and Persian and publishes his *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808),¹⁴⁸ a text that all but inaugurates the discipline of comparative

¹⁴⁷ Forster, *German Philosophy of Language*, esp. ch. 10, and *After Herder*, esp. chs. 1–2, 4; and Katie Terezakis, *The Immanent Word: The Turn to Language in German Philosophy, 1759–1801* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), esp. chs. 5–7 are illuminating treatments.

¹⁴⁸ Schlegel learnt Persian (Avestan and Palhavi) and Vedic Sanskrit under the great French ‘orientalist’ Antoine-Léonard de Chézy in Paris (the British linguist Alexander Hamilton also taught Schlegel Sanskrit). Franz Bopp and Wilhelm von Humboldt were also students of de Chézy. Schlegel came to idealize ancient India, its history, and its literature. Schlegel’s eldest brother Karl August worked for the British East India Company as an explorer and spy, dying in Madras (Chennai) of cholera in 1789. This personal connection seems to have fired Schlegel’s fascination with sub-continental Asian literature. The devotional tenor of this interest is present in his early thoughts on the significance for romanticism of Indic culture, prior to Schlegel’s study of any of its languages. In a way, India displaced Greece as the focus of the idea of a lost immediate unity, both in juxtaposition to modern forms of life and as an object of striving in its own right. Not only was Indic culture much older than its ancient Greek counterpart, it was more foreign to the European context while still being historically connected to it. It was for these reasons a deep repository of the kind of relatable ‘otherness’ in which Schlegel was interested. But it is important to keep in mind that this early attraction, which spikes in 1797 with Schlegel’s reactions to Herder’s review of Georg Forster’s 1791 German translation (of a translation into English) of Kālidāsa’s play *Śākuntala*, is not in the least disinterested—i.e. it is not neutral, scholarly attention to classical Indian literature that attempts to establish at arm’s length the background for its understanding. Instead, Schlegel’s interest is firmly staked in what he thinks the classical Indian context can do to illuminate romanticism. Does this involve it in what Edward Said calls ‘orientalism’? Schlegel comes in for passing, but rough, treatment in *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 98–9, and in a contemporaneous interview, collected in *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*, ed. G. Viswanathan (New York: Random House, 2001), pp. 27–8. Said concentrates on *Über die Sprache*. Whatever one thinks of the stability of the concept of orientalism (on which there has been a riot of writing both for and against), it strikes me that Said is by and large fair to Schlegel, even too fair at times. Said’s main claims are: (1) that Schlegel has little interest in Sanskrit literature as such, expropriating from it an origin for romanticism; (2) that the replacement of the classical European (Greek) with the classical Asian (Avestan/Vedic Sanskrit) source material allowed for even greater distance and thus idealization of that material, making it more susceptible to romanticizing; and (3) that it linguistically establishes a racist lineage that excludes as hierarchically inferior Chinese (von Humboldt did this as well), African languages and, crucially for Said, Semitic languages. On the other hand, Said credits Schlegel with a bit too much knowledge of Sanskrit (de Chézy was the first Professor of Sanskrit appointed to the Collège de France, but had been studying the language for less than a decade). Said never moderated his views on Schlegel, but in conversation freely admitted to me that the German

linguistics¹⁴⁹ and has some right to be seen historically as foundational to linguistics more generally.¹⁵⁰ This text, as indispensable as it is, departs from Schlegel's views on language in his Jena period. Reconstructing these earlier views is unavoidably somewhat speculative and, while it is important not to use anachronistically the 1808 treatise on language for clues to Schlegel's earlier views, it is also not possible to ignore that text altogether. In what follows, I attempt to adjust the received view in order to arrive at a picture of Schlegel's earlier philosophy of language.

Our point of departure is to allow that, like Herder (whose influence Schlegel does not always acknowledge), Schlegel holds that the connection of language to thought is a good deal closer than does the orthodoxy of his time and, again like Herder, he does not conceive of the nature of language in exclusively communicative terms. On the first count: Schlegel does not go so far as to identify thought with language, but he does hold that there is no thought that cannot in principle be expressed in linguistic form. That is, Schlegel denies

strain of orientalism was not as 'viral' (his word, to my memory) as the French one of Nerval, Flaubert, etc. because it was at least based in sound language training and had to its credit the founding of comparative literature. No Schlegel, no Auerbach; no Auerbach, no Said.

The basis for the hierarchy of languages in Schlegel is simple. The more highly inflected the language, the better. Because inflected languages are more 'condensed', they have less need of prepositions; their case-endings indicate more with fewer grammatical resources. Greek and Latin are inflected, of course, but the use of prepositions and enclitics is rampant. This is not so in Sanskrit, where noun case controls more meaning, verb roots and stems are much more regular, and adjectives, where pertinent, derive from verbs (not nouns) and thus exhibit more vitality. Sanskrit, Schlegel claims, is accordingly internally systematic in ways that even Greek and Latin are not (not to mention even more 'inferior' less inflected, Afro-Asiatic languages like classical Hebrew and classical Arabic). And pity Chinese, which lacks inflection altogether.

¹⁴⁹ *Über die Sprache* anticipates R.C. Rask's statement of what came to be known as Grimm's Law. Grimm's Law says that Proto-Germanic underwent three basic phonetic changes that distinguish it from other Indo-European languages: (1) a shift from voiceless stops to voiceless fricatives (e.g. Gr. 'πούς', Lat. 'pes' → Ger. 'Fuß', Eng. 'foot'); (2) a shift from voiced to voiceless stops (e.g. Gr. 'κύων', Lat. 'canis' → Ger. 'Hund', Eng. 'hound'); and (3) a shift from aspirated to non-aspirated stops (e.g. Russ. 'брат' → Ger. 'Bruder', Eng. 'brother'). Schlegel's remarks on the first shift are speculative, but they are nonetheless important for the development of historical linguistics in the nineteenth century. Incomplete as Schlegel's research was, the guiding principle behind it—that shared grammatical structure provides a better basis for grouping and differentiating languages in their development than does shared root vocabulary—is a mainstay of historical linguistics. Not all the tenets of Schlegel's linguistic theory have stood the test of time, however. Perhaps its most prominent feature, the idea of linguistic types so important for von Humboldt, is nowadays dismissed. According to this doctrine, languages could be arranged in terms of their primordality, and therefore in terms of their 'vitality' or 'expressivity,' by tracing in them strongly 'poetic' or 'epic' structures. In his views on etymology Heidegger helps himself to this strand of nineteenth-century linguistic theory. See Forster, *German Philosophy of Language*, pp. 7–44, for an excellent overview of Schlegel's philosophy of language and linguistic theory.

¹⁵⁰ But see Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 292–3.

linguistic ineffability.¹⁵¹ This observation about actual non-linguistic thought is sometimes treated as an attraction of Schlegel's position, a moderation on views that come later in nineteenth- and twentieth-century hermeneutics and linguistics like Schleiermacher's, Dilthey's, Heidegger's, and Whorf's, which do construe or come close to construing language and thought as identical. But another attraction is worth stressing here: Schlegel's view that thought is linguistic to the extent he allows does not entail the converse, i.e. the position that language is bound by thought. The view is neutral with regard to the questions such as, for instance, whether the unconscious is structured linguistically (Lacan) or whether music is linguistic (Wackenroder). This is because the unconscious mind does not 'think' according to Schlegel. Might there then be language without semantics for him? Schlegel holds something like this view, which brings us to the second count mentioned above. Language need not be a vehicle for information or be standardly communicative. This is an aid to Schlegel's primary interest in language and in historical linguistics: the power of language to convey the content *and form* of thought socially at sub-personal levels. Such infiltration of social meaning is impossible to trace in full in any given formation of thought. When Schlegel emphasizes the ever-retreating horizon line that the idea of the absolute provides, this unsurveyable social-semantic influence at its point of convergence with idiolects is in large part what he has in mind. What he never has in mind is the idea of a transcendent entity or even a transcendent ontological realm. The concept is best understood as hermeneutic.

One must keep this hermeneutic proviso firmly in mind when one considers statements Schlegel makes about poetry having unconscious meaning or being evaluated in terms of its pre-discursive depth. It is perfectly open to Schlegel to hold that there are elements of language that bear traces within them of the absolute's workings at pre-discursive and, therefore, sub-personal levels that express the absolute in quasi-immediate form. 'Pre-discursive', so deployed, would admit of degrees, and what Schlegel would be insisting upon here is that there are all manner of semantic, pragmatic, and even syntactical undercurrents in the social-historical life of a natural language, which present themselves to language users as they emerge. To say this is no more than to say that any natural language will have possible meanings that are not quite yet actual for the particular speaker in question, or perhaps for the entire group of speakers. This

¹⁵¹ See PhL II.i, 1117, KFSA 18: 289. This is in essence a short argument to the incorrectness of the poststructuralist interpretation of Schlegel offered, for instance, in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *L'Absolut littéraire*.

can operate at a lexical level—metaphor is often offered as meaning at the point of emergence, but the claim need not be so restricted. Could Brazilian Portuguese sentences be written in *that* way, with *that* syntax before Clarice Lispector did so? Many Brazilian writers answer in the affirmative. That they could be was latent; she made it express. Moreover, and a bit less abstractly, it can be the case that what an author means exceeded her grasp. When Schlegel famously insists that one must know an author better than she knows herself, this is his point.¹⁵² Note that this does not entail that one may supply an interpretation of a work or a person that in principle outstrips a *possible* self-understanding that she has. This ‘better than you’ form of interpretation, that is, does not offend Schlegel’s prescription for sensitive, immanent imaginative reconstruction of another’s point of view.¹⁵³

It is important to reiterate that this meaning is only available as such *to consciousness* under cognitive conditions. At best, one gets an ‘indication’ (*Andeutung*) of the activity as undisclosed in its workings at the conscious level. A large part of what Schlegel is after has to do with the expressive potentialities as they occur in the various natural languages. As we have seen, Schlegel is impressed positively with aspects of language that are labeled, many times with derogation by philosophers, as ‘rhetorical’. One can bring out what especially impresses him about rhetorical language by referring to ancient rhetoric’s aesthetic dimension. As is well known, it is important not to accept on its face Plato’s characterization of ancient rhetorical practice as geared only toward achieving instrumental aims. That was, of course, an aspect of the practice, but a more fundamental benefit of rhetoric was taken to be that beautiful speech expressed the beauty of character of the speaker and that being beautiful and participating with others in a beautiful manner was an intrinsic good. This is in part why Nietzsche stresses the importance of *style* for philosophers. It is precisely *not* that one should be *stylish*, i.e. *style-like*, for that is a bloodless contemporary variant of the treatment of beauty as merely superficial and occludes its relation to nobility of character. It is rather that one’s speech when it is most one’s own carries with it underlying tone, shape, and nuance that, although regularized in certain aspects, impresses one’s individuality onto the expression. Schlegel’s challenge is to find the best way to pivot this aspect of ancient rhetoric toward the modern idea of subjectivity, and that means to inflect as best one can the modern idea of subjective uniqueness or singularity with the ancient idea of daimonic character.

¹⁵² AFr. 401, KFSa 2: 241.

¹⁵³ It also does not offend Quentin Skinner’s constraint on proper historical explanation. See ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’ *History and Theory* 8 [1969]: 3–53.

A way of doing this is to deemphasize language's function to communicate information, which removes the stress on delineated propositional content of thought and enables this more purely expressive aspect of language to come forward.

The thought is simple but provocative: the elusiveness of the absolute is grasped now at the intersection of two things: (1) The presence in a unique individual human being of unconscious materials that are only just cresting to consciousness and are, thus, as unformed as is possible given the minimal demands of discursivity levied by consciousness. The capacity of the individual subject to let the material substrate 'breathe', to let it break through to consciousness without tamping it down in ways that readily accommodate it to received cognitive modalities—without repressing it, that is—is crucial. But: (2) at the discursive level, it is interpretation and not description, explanation, or knowledge that is the key to achieving maximal openness to the expressive dimension in experience. For, as we have seen, interpretation for Schlegel is the discursive activity tentative enough to allow the material as much freedom in its forms as is possible. This brings out in turn another important feature of *written* fragments for Schlegel. Because language is a repository of unconscious 'pre-style', each fragment will express this at the unconscious as well as at the conscious level. Fragments and the nesting interpretations of them will bear affinities to one another at both levels. But because those affinities are only available consciously, they can only be internal systematic features of a system of fragments at that level. The unconscious substrate of style is an anchor in the absolute, but one that can never be weighed.¹⁵⁴

There is a final aspect of Schlegel's position at the intersection of his ontology, philosophy of language and philosophy of history that requires discussion, for it is here that the pull of a more positive account of the pre-discursive origin of thought—the origin of thought *cum* language—can seem to reassert itself. Schlegel's own investigations into historical linguistics suggested to him the

¹⁵⁴ Admittedly, romanticism does not have a well-developed account of the unconscious if one judges it by, say, Freudian lights. So, anyone wanting a *theory* of the unconscious will be disappointed by Jena romanticism. Of course part of the point of Jena romanticism is that one cannot have a theory that articulates the structure of the absolute. All theory—all experience, in truth—only can arrive on the scene at an irretrievable distance from its source in the absolute. Anything one can say 'about' the absolute has that remove as a principle of structuration. This is the sense in which Schlegel's and Novalis's projects are 'transcendental'. Accordingly, if the unconscious is the absolute—which is far from clear for romanticism—the unconscious is precisely what one cannot have a theory of. What Schlegel advocates instead is never-ending *devotion* to the task of revealing the operations of subjectivity at their most singular, giving the best 'indication' at what might lie in advance of the subject. It should be stressed that the unconscious is not exempt from Schlegel's view that history and social circumstance bounds and grounds the experience of subjectivity. See KFSa 8: 48ff.

rather vague, nativist idea that, the further back in the history of a concept that one goes, the closer one could get to something like unique *reference* of the concept to the thing to which it applies.¹⁵⁵ The idea is simple and inviting, though some might say also insidious: as one goes back in the history of terms, one finds narrower and narrower ranges of meaning with the concepts, as well as fewer ‘redundancies’—that is, fewer concepts whose ranges of application substantially overlap. His adopting this view is likely due to the power exerted in continental historical linguistics by the goal of tracing European languages back to a single *Ur-language* in the Indo-European line. In any event, this line of reasoning can quickly default to the following idea. As one traces languages back to their origins, different languages combine into a single language and the elements in that single language approximate the status of *names*. That is not all: such an analysis of the progression through history of the generality of concepts is often dialectical. Concepts grow further away from their nominal sources not by replacing one another sequentially but rather by incorporating the entire prior historical sequence at implicit levels of meaning. (This idea is extraordinarily important for Hegel’s analysis of conceptual history—indeed, for his idea of what a concept is at all—and it is at least likely that Hegel encountered it in Schlegel’s 1800 Jena lectures.)¹⁵⁶ Schlegel can seem to adhere to such a view, as when he speaks of the ‘traces’ (*Spuren*) of primordial language abiding in Sanskrit (and after).¹⁵⁷ If one takes that impression of Schlegel, one might well take him to conclude that fragments operate dialectically to display the dissemination of meaning throughout the historically broken-apart meaning of the language at hand, but they do so in such a way that the interaction of fragments and their connotative force recalls and to an extent retrieves more original uses of language closer to the first expression of the absolute. The most powerful source of this

¹⁵⁵ See KFSA 8: 168–71. Schlegel here deploys the crucial concept *Besonnenheit* inherited from Herder.

¹⁵⁶ Hegel moved to Jena from Frankfurt in January 1801. He immediately inserted himself in the philosophical culture there, such as it was (Fichte was on the way out due to the ‘Atheism Controversy’, Novalis had moved back to Wiessenfels and died, and the *Athenäum* had by this time shut down publication). Schlegel lectured until March of that year. It would be odd if Hegel did not sample Schlegel’s presentation, for no other reason than that he, Hegel, wished to convert his master’s degree into a doctorate by the short route of a public disputation, as had Schlegel. Karl Rosenkranz does not mention Schlegel in connection to Hegel’s development in the Jena years. See *Georg Wilhelm Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Dunher und Humblot, 1844). In his comprehensive and still worthwhile treatment of Hegel’s development of his conception of dialectic in Jena, Haering does not mention Schlegel in connection with Hegel’s Jena years. See *Hegel. Sein Wollen und sein Werk* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929) I: 762ff. H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, vol. 2, *Night Thoughts (Jena 1801–1806)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) follow suit.

¹⁵⁷ KFSA 8: 170. Cf. note 149, this chapter.

idea was perhaps Hamann's more theologically driven variant of it, although the conduit from Hamann to Schlegel was likely Jacobi. The idea is present in a much more attenuated form in Herder too. Regardless of its ultimate source, and although it is suspect in linguistics, this idea exerted its power on the subsequent development of psychology, and of psychoanalysis in particular. In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* Freud writes of the mind's preservation of the past on analogy with Rome's history, where archeological remnants are intertwined with the city's present, a place where nothing that once was will ever entirely pass away. All earlier stages of development are present, obscured though they may be; the deeper one plumbs archaic sources, the more one reveals the fundamental psychodynamic determinants.

Concluding Remarks: Crisis and Response

We began this chapter by tracing the convergence of two aspects of the philosophy of self-consciousness as it developed in Kant and afterwards in the first generation of his critics, one concerning formal elements of self-consciousness and the other experiential aspects of the same. The point of convergence most important for the Jena romantics was Fichte and, although Schlegel's thought contains a repudiation of many of Fichte's aims and claimed technical accomplishments, it too attempts to express in its own way the convergence between formal and experiential aspects of self-consciousness. Irony is, after all, a dialectical species of synthesis, i.e. synthesis under conditions of a particular conception of non-closure, or perhaps an extension of what Kant allowed to unconstrained productive imagination. Moreover, this innovative account of the convergence of formal dialectical self-consciousness and its lived character is put forward, as we also discussed, as a response to the philosophical demand of the times to reorient thinking about the question of the origin of subjectivity. As we have interpreted it, the organizing concept of Jena romanticism—its conception of the absolute—diverges from idealism in two important ways. The first of these has to do with the use to which the concept is put. In Schlegel especially use is hermeneutic, even in an extended sense 'pragmatic'. The absolute is not a supernatural entity whose function is to anchor empirical subjective categories in order to vouchsafe a transcendent source of freedom, an objective world order modeled on analogy with physics, or both. For a thinker like Schlegel the absolute refers to what will escape any attempt at exhaustive self-understanding due to the incapacities of subjects to discern over the sum of experience the dependency of their thought on linguistic and social forms of life that are through and through historical. One may argue about whether this encompasses all possible modes of experience, or

whether there are some such modes that are sufficiently close to physics to which the principle of the absolute does not apply. In any case, the boundary between the *a priori* and *a posteriori* is blurred, and the boundary at least must be subject to potential revision. Rebutting the preconception that Schlegel is operating with a metaphysical rather than a social-ontological conception of the absolute, and of what he takes to be the three primary regimens of subjective formation that follow from that social-ontological conception, has been a main point of our presentation of his views. That said, there is a tendency in romanticism—Novalis has the tendency, as does the early Schelling—to establish more continuity with the Kantian reliance on scientific categories as general philosophical models by substituting for physics nascent nineteenth-century understandings of the basic principles of biology and chemistry. We have not discussed this dimension in any detail. The justification for this neglect is two-fold. First, while this line is very well developed in Schelling, the same cannot be said for Novalis. Second, Schlegel is superior to Novalis to the extent that such speculations do not cloud his hermeneutic program (although not only on that basis). There was constant crosstalk between philosophical understandings of biology and hermeneutics in the mid- to late-nineteenth century in Europe. This is even more evident in the classical sources of American pragmatism. The dispute among neo-Kantians about the correct way to think of the relation of the ‘natural’ and the ‘human’ sciences was an attempt to describe boundaries between two orders of explication. Our approach to this question is to attempt to isolate the hermeneutic social scientific punch of Jena romanticism from what have turned out scientifically to be rather dubious assumptions about the organic structure of all that is.

A second emphasis of our interpretation has underlined the openly self-conscious relation of romantic philosophy to history. It is not merely that romanticism is self-avowedly open to the dependency of the content of philosophical concepts on historical possibilities; rather, it is an entirely formal principle. More precisely, as we have seen, the Jena romantics attempt to seed the very form of their philosophical systems with sensitivity to their potential defeasance—to encode in the form of a system what they take to be an appropriate responsiveness to the contingencies of history and idiosyncratic personal experience, in the teeth of the constitutive remoteness of the absolute. This involves answering the question of how to register the balance purportedly struck between the need for relation to an origin with the need to be realistic about the power of contingent historical developments to radically alter the terms in which one sees oneself as so related. The question of origins—of where a thing comes from, where one comes from, perhaps where everything comes from—can still seem natural for humans to pose. The world is complex and often unpredictable,

and it makes sense to seek order in it, if for nothing else, so as better to gauge one's expectations and dispositions to future action. It is also a common thought that the further back one can push one's knowledge of a thing's or person's origin, the more one knows about it. European philosophy since its pre-Socratic beginnings has been concerned with questions of the origin of the world and, since Plato, has joined that concern with another having to do with the value of being human. In the modern period this combination is further specified, and issues of the value not just of being human, but of being a human *subject* become inextricably bound up with those of origin. With early German romanticism one finds oneself just barely on one side of an important historical dividing line: whether or not asking after origins makes sense any longer outside natural science. Schlegel's and Novalis' answer to the question is that it does still make sense to ask after origins, but only just, i.e. only under the condition that the concept 'origin' designates something from which nothing specific and tangible can be drawn. Both deny categorically that philosophy can establish anything like a deductive or transcendental ground for a science of subjectivity in any of its dimensions: theoretical, moral, social, or aesthetic. Such a foundation would have to be unconditioned and, if there were a single catchphrase that might encapsulate Jena romanticism it would be 'nothing unconditioned, only the conditioned'. A theory according to which the origin cannot operate as a foundation is a theory according to which standard notions of systematicity cannot hold. We have seen this at work in Schlegel, and it is he who modulates the idea of systematic form away from foundationalism and towards something quite different. Again, the experiential point is worth marking: his idea of how systems of thought are properly formed involves claims about how one should, at this historical point in time, think of the coherence and communicability of one's own life.

In the Introduction we noted that post-Kantian German intellectual life was permeated by two moods that in the end are not entirely distinct. On the one hand, there was an expansive sense of revolution and possibility in the wake of Kant's critical philosophy. Kant was seen to settle several outstanding epistemological and metaphysical issues satisfactorily and to forward a new philosophical program within which each of the separate domains of philosophy might progress. On the other hand, because it drove so deeply into basic issues across a wide range of philosophical applications, Kant was interpreted as having unintentionally uncovered a more acute form of philosophical anxiety, leading to a widespread sense of crisis that centered on questions of self-knowledge and social well-being. Kant had raised the bar on what could count as philosophical criticism, and after that arose a tide of criticism, much of it washing over the historical Kant. German idealism is driven to settle these philosophical accounts,

and thereby to institute a form of general intellectual life in which certain orientation can be taken on the issues of the day. The obsession with rigorous systematicity in German idealism is, among other things, an attempt to place a definitive shape on how one should think and live. To this extent, German idealism in this period is concerned with increasing cultural stability. Early German romanticism does not seem to be so concerned, or at least not in the same way. The overall impression one takes from Schlegel is that he is intent on holding in abeyance any rush to false stability and insisting that one adopt an explicitly experimental attitude towards life and mind. He is content to allow German intellectual life in the wake of Goethe, Fichte, and the French Revolution to messily develop from out of its historically contingent native internal conceptual resources without antecedent philosophical gerrymandering. More generally one might say that the Jena circle is primarily interested in the phenomenon of how thought and value *emerge* from their historical context. Recognizing that this sort of wait-and-see modesty is part of Jena romanticism is contrary to received views of its central claims as a volatile mix of ill-considered utopian communitarianism, half-baked mythological speculation, and sheer flights of political and ethical fancy. Commentators frequently observe that philosophy for the Jena romantics was done *in medias res* but stop short of plumbing the full significance of the observation. It is true that interest in the emergence of subjectivity over its stability is an intellectual sign of those times. It is also undeniable that there is an aspect of romantic thought that takes emergence to be all that there is—i.e. that the task of philosophy and poetry is a continual and perpetual emergence and registering of that emergence from within. But one can only take the full measure of this attention to emergence by reference to their doctrine of the absolute. A subject's relationship to his own basic subjectivity is always at a remove, and yet the recognition of being in that situation is occluded by the very medium of subjectivity. False hope results. One might think that these elements of subjectivity would have negative personal effects—that the recognition that the absolute can never be experienced would cause a sense of loss, be an object of mourning or even morbidity. There are indeed strands of romanticism in which such loss is prominent as well as an important set of critical reactions to Jena romanticism (e.g. Hegel, Kierkegaard) that takes this to be one of its essential characteristics. But we hope to have shown that the main emphasis of Jena romanticism is, rather, on the liberation that focusing properly on the still-emergent character of ideals brings with it. A subject's relation to the absolute is itself in a constant process of emerging; even when apparently well formed, there are always ways to build upon or tear down parts of the structure. When Collingwood writes that '[a]rt is the sleep of the soul' he does not mean that it is cognitively negligible;

rather, he means that it is the root of emerging forms of 'waking life'.¹⁵⁸ Schlegel would have agreed. This is not to say that such emergence will not be directive; it is perfectly compatible with the views of the Jena circle that various contingent pockets of such direction should develop. Such pockets are liable to pass away in time and properly so, never able to achieve truly universal status while retaining their concrete connection with the practice of being a subject.¹⁵⁹

Confronted by a perceived disunity and fragmentation of modern life in the wake of Kant's philosophy, Schlegel (and, in a more moderate and less interesting sense, Novalis) accentuates the *prospective* position of a group of intellectuals and artists attempting to make a new form of life out of the resources delivered by Kantian and Fichtean criticism, all the while writing what amounts to a philosophical diary of the very attempt. They are concerned with understanding in concrete terms the imaginative processes of coming to grips with one's subjectivity, with how one *begins* to be philosophical given the radical change in circumstance. Kant, philosophical revolutionary though he may have been in many respects, had a more conservative and *retrospective* agenda: to revamp the metaphysical and epistemological resources of modern philosophy in order to shore up philosophy's claim to be basic for scientific rationality. On the moral front, he took Rousseau's untidy account of anti-social ethics and extruded from it the notion of the moral law as a categorical imperative. This retrospective cast of mind—what Nietzsche calls 'Alexandrian' thinking—despairs of disunity and casts about among found materials to locate the most powerful tools to quell the sense of being ill at ease.¹⁶⁰ This Hellenistic frame of thought is in full force in Hegel and in his reaction to romanticism.

¹⁵⁸ *Speculum Mentis, or the Map of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 59. Cf. Keats' notion of 'negative capability' as 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason', Letter of John Keats to George and Thomas Keats, 22.XII.1817, in *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats: Cambridge Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), p. 277.

¹⁵⁹ There is an informative discussion of this dimension in Novalis' thought in Alice Kuzniar, *Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 80–99.

¹⁶⁰ *Die Geburt der Tragödie* § 18, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*. Ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff.), 1: 116.

2

Irony Displaced, or Hegel

By the time Hegel began to develop philosophical positions independent of those of his more precocious friends and mentors Hölderlin and Schelling, the crucial developments in Jena romanticism were already in the past.¹ All the principals had decamped from the city, and the philosophical concerns of Schlegel in particular had begun to turn from responding to early idealism in the form of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* to questions of the foundations of natural language, philosophy of the visual arts, and politics. Schlegel's lectures in 1800–1 turned out to be a valediction, and their unfinished (indeed, interrupted) form can seem particularly appropriate given Schlegel's own views on philosophical fragments. If Hegel attended those lectures they were likely formative for him, certainly for his reception of romanticism and perhaps for much more. Either way, what he saw and heard was for him the last direct word on the Jena scene.

The idea of *symphilosophieren* conveys a strong sense of shared social purpose in philosophy, but it is important to note that it also connotes an exclusive philosophical practice, a connotation that is not beside the point when the operations of irony are at issue. The Jena romantics had a heightened sense that what they were creating philosophically and artistically—their way of life—was to a certain degree insular. They hoped that, in time, this insularity would fade and that romanticism would spread—in part the call for the development of a 'new mythology' is dedicated to just this purpose—but they agreed that the conditions for the initial growth of the body of thought of early German romanticism needed special historical and social conditions and that Jena in the last half-decade of the eighteenth century provided them. That said, the group

¹ As is well known Hegel's early published work is firmly under the influence of Schelling. When some question arose as to the authorship of *Glauben und Wissen* (1802), the last of Hegel's early works under such influence, Jacobi correctly identified Hegel as the 'scribbler' due to the artless composition of the essay. See Brief von Jacobi an Köppen, 10.VIII.1802, in Friedrich Köppen, *Schellings Lehre oder das Ganze der Philosophie des absoluten Nichts, Nebst Dry Briefen verwandten Inhalts von Friedr. Heinr. Jacobi* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1802), pp. 209–41. Hegel's distinctiveness first shows itself in the so-called *Jenaer Systementwürfe* (1803/4).

of thinkers to which Schlegel and Novalis belonged was not limited strictly to Jena; they welcomed philosophical conversation from like-minded thinkers in Berlin and elsewhere. Moreover, Schlegel in particular was concerned to promulgate romanticism through various journals he edited. Still, the philosophical views of the early German romantics were self-consciously idiosyncratic and in a constant process of change; their precise course of development would have been very difficult for anyone outside the circle to fully appreciate.

One might think that Hegel had some advantage over other outsiders in coming to grips with the Jena scene in virtue of his first-hand experience of Schlegel and on account of his friendship with Schelling, who was well aware of the Novalis-Schlegel group.² But in fact Hegel's understanding of Jena romanticism betrays his distance from it. While it is true that Hegel was an assiduous and often astute reader of the intellectual periodicals in which the Jena writers published, and that his deep admiration for Schiller had sparked his interest in Jena, he achieved his final understanding of the intellectual structure of Jena romanticism largely at second hand through other public sources, for instance Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger's synopsis of the movement. Solger's work on romanticism is quite important to consider in relation to Hegel's thought; some of Hegel's views on the romantics predate his exposure to Solger, but Solger's work arguably offered Hegel a handy way to pigeonhole romanticism, which likely influenced his treatment of romanticism in his aesthetics lectures.³

Hegel's official assessment of Jena romanticism is in the end unstintingly negative, a reaction quite exceptional for Hegel, who is more or less systematically committed to finding *some* redeeming aspect in *any* philosophical position. Indeed, to find a philosophical view as hollow as he at first blush seems to find Jena romanticism would be to court the cardinal Hegelian sin of being dialectically 'one-sided'. It is true that, in a way, Hegel satisfies his self-imposed

² Whether Hegel himself counts as a 'romantic' is a matter of some controversy and rests with what precisely one would want to mark by the term in that connection. Often what is meant is that Hegel takes from the romantics and from Herder the conception of social groups as 'organic', i.e. that their parts—perhaps even their individual constituents—are organized in terms of the ends of the social whole, etc. For Hegel the romantic, see Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, ed. H. Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 101–2. More guarded is Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 99–100; see also *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

³ Solger was not in the Schlegel circle but his friendship with Tieck (who edited Solger's *Nachlaß*) kept him on its periphery. Solger tends to conflate the views of the Schlegel brothers, often attributing to Friedrich the much more underdeveloped positions of his brother August. For a convenient collection of Hegel's writings on Solger, see *L'ironie romantique. Compte rendu des écrits posthumes et correspondance de Solger*, ed. and trans. J. Reid (Paris: Vrin, 1997). We shall discuss at length the importance of Solger for Hegel at the conclusion of this chapter.

desideratum that all roads lead to his own dialectical Rome when he allows romanticism a formally dialectical treatment under the rubric of 'Evil' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. That noted, however, it seems that no other philosophical position so vexed him. Why? There are two standard answers in the literature. The first belongs properly to the field of intellectual history and concentrates on prejudices Hegel might have exercised towards romanticism stemming from his personal literary tastes, his sense of social decorum, and his antecedent intellectual allegiances. Hegel's literary leanings were decidedly in the direction of Weimar classicism, and the fact that Schiller came in for especially sharp criticism by August and Friedrich Schlegel irked Hegel. One might draw the conclusion from this that Hegel sought to exact penalties on the Schlegels. Hegel also seems to have disapproved of the on-again-off-again communal housing arrangements of some members of the Jena group, and it was no doubt a simple matter to extend this censoriousness to their literary output, some of which he found disagreeable on account of its (for that time) rather explicit sexual content (e.g. Schlegel's *Lucinde*).⁴ Moreover, Hegel roundly disapproved of—one might even say he hated—Caroline Schlegel-Schelling, wife of August Schlegel, then of Schelling, who was a formidable presence in Jena both intellectually and erotically.⁵ Finally, whatever early animus Hegel bore against Friedrich Schlegel, his attitude further soured after the Napoleonic victory over Austria in 1809.⁶ Schlegel had written propaganda on behalf of the Austrian war effort (indeed he drafted the Austrian declaration of war) and, after the treaty with France, his fate was, to say the least, unclear. Hegel was not exactly being kind when he wrote to Niethammer that Schlegel, the 'putative liberator of Austria', would be lucky if the gallows remained liberated from him'.⁷

Informative as the biographical case for Hegel's narrow-mindedness and moral rectitude may be, it cannot take one to the center of the philosophical dispute between Hegel and romanticism. A more philosophical approach has taken its initial bearings from Hegel's concern that Jena romanticism cannot help but result in radical skepticism born from relativism, positions that Hegel judges to be both philosophically incoherent and culturally dangerous. Hegel's understanding

⁴ On the revolutionary nature of Schlegel's conception of love, see Theodor Ziolkowski, *Vorboten der Moderne. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Frühromantik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), pp. 40ff.

⁵ Terry Pinkard stresses this antipathy. See *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 112–13. Hegel was not alone in this; as Pinkard notes, Schiller had taken to calling her 'Dame Lucifer' (*Hegel: A Biography*, p. 112).

⁶ There is also the issue of Schlegel's conversion to Catholicism. See *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechtes* § 141 Zusatz, HW 7: 290.

⁷ *Hegel Briefe*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952), I: 283, cited in Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 286 n. 49.

of the philosophical deficiencies of romanticism has been decisive for much later European philosophy, and for this reason alone its substance is important to detail and assess. On the interpretation offered in chapter one, it will turn out that Hegel's interpretation of Jena romanticism is incomplete and immoderate; it presupposes his own teleological account of the development of modern philosophy and thus does not offer a proper immanent critique of the romantic position. As a general matter, establishing the claim that Hegel mistakes the philosophical resources of Jena romanticism is important because it undermines the historical hegemony of his critique. The claim itself is not original; it expresses a minority view that crops up every so often at least since Dilthey and Benjamin. But bringing attention to the presuppositions that are latent in Hegel's critique of romanticism enables one to give a more comprehensive account of the *Auseinandersetzung* between Hegelianism and romanticism. To that end, I wish to investigate three further matters that have received much less attention. First, I wish to consider in more detail than is usual the possibility that the substance and tenor of Hegel's treatment of romanticism is due to the uncomfortable proximity of Hegel's own conception of dialectic to Schlegel's views on irony. As a matter of dialectical exposition Hegel must allow for the conceptual overlap of Schlegel's conception of irony and Hegelian dialectic. This is the ostensive subject matter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which he sets out the form of consciousness he denominates the 'Beautiful Soul or Evil', the resolution of which yields a 'form of consciousness' that approximates Hegel's own views.⁸ Structural comparison of Hegelian dialectic and Schlegelian irony

⁸ Of course this does not exactly close the book on the *Phenomenology*, since Hegel then steps through instantiations of *Geist's* social self-consciousness in the forms of 'Natural Religion', 'Art-Religion', and 'Revealed Religion' (and then in the singleton division of 'Absolute Knowledge'). How to conceive the relation between the last major division of the *Phenomenology*, 'Religion' and the directly preceding chapters comprising the division he calls 'Spirit' will depend on how one understands the architectonic of the treatise as a whole. My own view is that the main divisions of the *Phenomenology* correspond to different levels of analysis from the point of view of 'science' that can be brought to *Geist's* activity and not to sequential forms, from the point of view of 'experience', of that activity. 'Spirit' to 'Religion' considers forms of *Geist's* self-understanding as substantially 'other-directed', where the sociality of reason is conceived of as achieving a sense of the common stake in reason as a form of action by bridging a perceived gap of 'others' as individual and autonomous centers of authority. 'Religion' treats forms of felt substantiality from the perspective of an antecedent accepted community, where overcoming individual boundaries is not necessary. The forms of Religion evolve by making more explicitly rational this already accepted basis for substantiality in community. The transition from the last form of Spirit, 'Beautiful Soul, or Evil' and the first form of Religion, 'Natural Religion' has to do with the ethical recognition that individual autonomy is ultimately insufficient for ethical well-being. With this the philosopher defaults in her analysis to a genetic taxonomy of ideas of community where the community as such is seen as antecedently ethically valuable. One might say, then, that 'Beautiful Soul, or Evil' completes Hegel's investigation into the ethical resources of views where 'otherness' is a social component. In this

reveals both the similarities and differences in Hegel's and Schlegel's accounts and makes vivid the stake Hegel has in distancing himself from romanticism. Similarly, close analysis of Hegelian dialectic as a kind of 'completed' irony illuminates features of Schlegel's ironic practice, Hegel's dialectical method, and the career of irony in post-Kantian European philosophy that might otherwise remain obscure. Second, I wish to consider in light of Hegel's criticism of romanticism the role that artistic rationality continues to play in his own system. Here the main focus will be upon Hegel's various lectures in the philosophy of art from his Berlin period, in which he mounts a flanking attack on romantic irony by insisting upon the retrograde character of what he terms 'subjective humor'. The main thrust of his argument is especially cutting: subjective humor is not even a tenable aesthetic understanding of the ultimate significance of *art*. With this conclusion in hand, Hegel then proposes to substitute for irony a conception of 'objective humor' that allegedly is a more fitting model for what was valuable in the then contemporary literature. A consideration of Hegel's aesthetics also clarifies his position on an issue crucial to the romantics and to irony, i.e. what would cutting-edge art have to be in order to keep up, as best it can, with cutting-edge philosophical theory? Finally, Hegel's treatment of objective humor provides an important entry point to Kierkegaard's critique of romantic irony and Hegelian idealism, the topic of chapter three. Kierkegaard in essence triangulates Socrates, the romantics, and Hegel in order to generate a foil for his own positive account of irony and 'humor' and the proper ongoing role of aesthetics in philosophical reflection. Kierkegaard accepts central aspects of Hegel's critique of romanticism but finds residual romantic resources on which to base his own rejection of Hegelian 'science'.

Synopsis of Schlegel's Vision Going Forward

Assessing Hegel's relation to and critique of Jena romanticism requires concentration on his account of Schlegel, whom he clearly has in mind as the primary representative of the Jena circle.⁹ This chapter looks at three sources in which Hegel's critique of Schlegel is especially vigorous and telling: (1) Hegel's account in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of the philosophical position and form of consciousness he calls 'Evil' and the conditions for what he terms 'forgiveness'; (2) his

sense, it would be right to say that romanticism is dialectically close to Hegel's own views on elements of individuality in ethics.

⁹ Hegel mentions Novalis in passing as expressing the 'yearning of a beautiful soul' and 'irony'. See HW 11: 215; 13: 211; 20: 418.

account in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* of humor, irony, and their philosophical value; and (3) his review of Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger's synoptic account of early German romanticism. These are not the only venues in which Hegel treats romanticism, but they are important and indicative ones, central not only for his views on romanticism but also for the form in which the young Kierkegaard takes up those views.

Before delving into specifics concerning Hegel's understanding and critique of romanticism, it is worthwhile to step back and remind ourselves of the main claims Schlegel makes on behalf of irony and allied doctrines. This will allow us to approach Hegel's critique with more equanimity and greater overall philosophical result.

Schlegel associates irony and related cognitive regimens with achieving a species of cognitive and practical *balance*.¹⁰ Subjectivity is the activity of striking this balance, and the balance in question obtains between (A) commitment to various evaluative orders and (B) critical distance from the ultimate binding force of any such order. To be ultimately binding, such an order would have to answer to the sum total of all possible orders concomitant with possible forms of subjectivity, and that would be on offer only if one were able to cognitively penetrate the absolute, a possibility that Schlegel denies. We canvassed at length in chapter one the arguments for the denial.

Schlegel holds that one is driven to the idea that the unity of subjective powers—and thus the unity of the subject—must ultimately be *thought* to have an unconditioned source. Only such a source could satisfy the idea of true unity. On the interpretation of Schlegel on offer in chapter one, this source is not itself an article of knowledge or even of experience more generally, and cannot, therefore, play the 'scientific' foundational role demanded of it by early idealists like Fichte. Its existence is a problematic posit. This brings Schlegel closer to Kant in

¹⁰ In a way, Schlegel's view on the matter might be considered with qualification to be kindred with ideas present in Pyrrhonic skepticism, according to which one achieves 'tranquility' (*ἀταραξία*) by means of adducing equal and opposite arguments as to a matter (*ἰσοσθένεια*), so that one may say 'no more' (*οὐδὲι μᾶλλον*) that one is truer than the other. This results in one's 'suspending' judgment (*ἐπέχουμαι*) and thus in a dissolution of the inherent tension brought about by having to contrast the way the world is and the several ways it may be taken to be. But, unlike its ancient forbear, romantic irony does not seek a resting place for agency. Instead, the balance is to be struck by embracing the inherently unsettled nature of thought in its relation to the world. One might see here the nub of the disagreement between Hegel and Schlegel: that there can be a form of balance that is not a matter of cognitive rest, theoretical or practical completion, or convergence on identity-giving norms. Hegel treats what he considers the cognitive correlate to Pyrrhonic skepticism in the 'Skepticism' chapter of the *Phenomenology*. It is telling that the resolution of this form of consciousness is the first self-consciously bifurcated form of consciousness treated in the *Phenomenology*, what Hegel calls 'Unhappy Consciousness'. French lines of Hegel reception often understand Kierkegaard to be cognate to this form of consciousness.

a way, but it is important to note even so that Schlegel places conditions on the content of the posit that are much stricter than Kant's own: in particular, the condition that the absolute can only be thought of in terms of unalloyed, simple totality. To conceive of the absolute straightforwardly in terms of self-relation is to be a *bien pensant* idealist. Even if one tends in virtue of one's finitude to think of the absolute in this way, that is a result of the limitation of discursive thought and not a property of the absolute. The philosopher must proceed with a built-in modification of thought that corrects for the inevitability of deploying finite categories in the domain of the infinite. But such correction itself is limited to finite means of conception and so cannot, as it were, present the absolute in some other form. Rather, the correction in question can only reflect self-consciousness of the limitation; the philosopher must then (1) develop cognitive routines that can display the fundamental structure of experience, and (2) at the same time, embed within the routines the distance required by circumspect appreciation of her inability to limn the ultimate structure of subjectivity. For Schlegel this is the sinew that connects what I have argued are the three procedures that are the centerpieces of his theory: reciprocal proof, global regulativism, and irony.

In line with the first element one must view subjectivity as 'grounded' in the way we have seen Schlegel claiming, i.e. so that each subject must as a condition of her self-consciousness think of her self as emerging from an elemental selfsame-identity that is beyond both conceptual grasp and perceptual tangibility. Schlegel shares with Kant and early German idealism the doctrine that it is only through synthetic acts of perception, imagination, and cognition that the world can take on meaning for finite, discursive beings, but he rejects the idealist move to fill the gap between foundation and what is founded by means of direct appeal to a special form of intuition (Fichte, Schelling) or the positing of special kinds of discrete entities that may be thought to be possible ultimate objects of a non-finite understanding (Kant). He rejects the first as falling back into Platonism; he rejects the second on the grounds that it posits specious substitutes for the absolute that are mere artifacts of a misjudgment concerning the 'needs of reason'. Seen from Schlegel's vantage point, both approaches are skewed by apprehension that, without some way to model the absolute in terms that are comprehensible to finite reason or presentable in perception, subjects will be cast adrift in their subjectivity, unmoored from its foundation and at sea in an incomprehensible world. Schlegel is by no means unsympathetic to the fear but believes that standard ways of confronting it are fainthearted. Like Kant, Schlegel is concerned to give an account of transcendental illusion and to show its knowing usefulness. But Schlegel includes in this category Kant's own doctrine of things in themselves.

Along the second dimension above, one must always express one's distance from the absolute. Schlegel's schema for such expression involves both an appeal to the singularity of individual experience and imaginative projection and partial understanding of the same first-personal experience on the part of others. Each subject in the course of life experiences the world in various ways specific to him. These experiences require for their possibility the constructive, synthetic autonomy of the mind, with the result that there are any number of ways of understanding and acting in a coordinated way in that world. Some of these ways, even within a single subject's life, may compete with one another, both in terms of their content and in terms of precedence at any one time. This is to say that one's experience not only exhibits great plurality but also exhibits it in sometimes pointed ways—by bringing together various experiences and ways of self-understanding that do not sit comfortably with one another. This is so even if one grants, as Schlegel does, that one's experience is unified as one's own simply in virtue of being a result of one's synthetic activity. Because Schlegel does not deem that activity to have a priori limitations—at least with respect to experience in linguistic, moral, and aesthetic domains—the resulting unity is loose-grained. If one desires a stable focus of a transcendental self philosophically antecedent to experience in either the formal (Kant) or more substantive (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) senses, Schlegel will disappoint. His point is that this sort of a priori guarantee is not available, if one is appropriately rigorous about the issue of grounding. The idea of a ground provides, when combined with that of discursive limitation, a set of protocols by means of which to demonstrate to oneself via experience the fleeting nature of experiential connection to the absolute.

This is where the third of the centerpiece components enters into the account. Schlegel holds that no evaluative order can exhaust one's subjective identity. Now, there is a way to caricature the position as involving the affirmation of a contradiction—a performative contradiction—especially if one focuses exclusively on the impact of Schlegel's doctrines in those domains of philosophy in which cognitive invariance is often taken to be a hallmark. So, for instance, in the epistemic context one might think that Schlegel's account of irony requires that one both hold a proposition true and not true. While it is the case that Schlegel's account of the balance to be struck heightens the stakes of being subjective by increasing the tension between the demands of normativity and those of subjectivity, thinking of the tension in terms of contradiction mistakes irony for assertion.¹¹ We saw that it is part of Schlegel's claim that what believing, say, a

¹¹ One might think this a simple point to make, but it still needs emphasizing, as Bernard Williams has done. See *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002),

proposition amounts to is, upon philosophical inspection, being drawn *both* to (1) settling on the world as being *that* way to the exclusion of others and to (2) acknowledging proleptically by dint of imagination that belief might just as well organize the world differently.¹² Philosophers nowadays might capture what Schlegel is after by distinguishing the propositional content of the belief from the force with which it is held. Schlegel, however, views these two aspects as constitutive of having a belief at all. If one treats belief merely as a matter of cognitively settling things, one is treating one of the aspects of belief as predominant, and doing so is more a matter of responding to cognitive threats (of skepticism, etc.) that originate from contingent historical and cultural exigencies than it is of strict universal invariance. Schlegel's view on how destabilizing irony (or a cognate doctrine) can be without thereby compromising one's capacity to successfully navigate the world is rather pragmatic. Irony need not undercut cognitive orientation, so long as one does not assume that success can only be anchored in invariance. To the contrary, irony (or any cognate doctrine) sharpens orientation by promoting openness to potential adaptation. (Lack of certainty is not equivalent to uncertainty, after all.) In sum, for Schlegel attempts to model the kind of stability necessary for the undertaking of being a 'subjective subject' after the kind presupposed by scientific canons of objectivity are ill-founded—in essence, category errors. They offer the wrong kind of solution to the problem of being a subject.

Viewed more dialectically, however, contradiction plays a positive and essential role in German idealist accounts of conceptual development. For example, it is a stock Hegelian claim that contradiction within a 'form of consciousness' impels agents within that form to question basic, implicit presuppositions that yield the contradiction. Once these presuppositions have been modified sufficiently or removed the contradiction will also be removed, and one will have a superior form of consciousness, at least to the degree that it is no longer contradictory (in that way). This stepwise Hegelian picture is, however, countered *ab initio* by romanticism. As we saw, opposition only entails mutual

p. 73. Williams is there discussing irony as a speech act, but the point transfers into the romantic context. Indeed, one might say that it is especially important to make in that context.

¹² The nature of the relation between assertion and belief is a source of controversy, some holding that asserting *p* is at least tantamount to believing that *p*, some holding that there is no such implication. On our reconstruction Schlegel views assertion and belief disjunctively: irony is not assertion but does involve (idiosyncratically structured) belief. For Hegel assertion does imply belief that what is asserted is true, but there is a deeper dialectical structure in which assertion conditions are holistically embedded and such belief contextually qualified. Contextual qualification of belief is also present in Schlegel, as we have seen, but there is no closed series of possible contexts, as there is in Hegel.

exclusion (i.e. 'contradiction') if the opposition obtains between determinate, fixed entities.¹³ But as we saw it is precisely Schlegel's view that irony involves 'fragments', and fragments are inherently indeterminate. They stand proxy for imaginative impetus or 'tendencies' in thought; given this, not only may opposition not imply contradiction, it may also be that opposition *in itself* is sustainable and that the elements in opposition with one another are mutually reinforcing and conjointly constitutive.

We also saw that this need not mean that Schlegel is empty-handed when it comes to accounting for modest forms of being bound by norms. Moreover, it is compatible with Schlegel's basic view that necessary constraints operate constitutively with limited (though perhaps still broad) scope. For Schlegel, how much one requires in the way of the unity of self is a function of what sort of unity is required under shifting historical circumstances. Schlegel's emphasis is firmly on deepening one's sense of one's own subjectivity and, in his estimation, this requires the subject to consider herself as the originator of a plurality of ways to take the world as basically (and non-basically) meaningful. That is, in order that the subject increases her grasp of the nature of her subjectivity (and to that extent *be* the most subjective subject she can be) she must view the requirements of unity and plurality as reciprocal: unity is enhanced by plurality and plurality by unity. But, again, since there is no absolute unity available to subjects, and since there is a great deal of plurality around, the profound experience by subjects of themselves as subjects is practically indexed to and dependent upon the plurality of experience. Schlegel's account of the interlocking protocols of reciprocal proof, global regulative reason, and irony places a premium on operations of imagination that he takes to be basic to plural thinking. The idea that imagination is basic to human cognitive and conative orientation is not novel of course; Hume and Kant allow for as much. But the necessary role for the productive imagination in Kant's general theory of cognition, for instance, is to 'stage' possible cognitions in a way that brings them into connection with determination of *actual* manifolds of intuition. For Schlegel that is precisely *not* the correct rendition of the basic condition of thought; thinking is rather by its very nature fleeting and fluid, and while due attention may be given to the 'edge' of thoughts—where one thought ends and another follows, how they combine in terms of overlapping similarities, etc.—it is a mistake to identify thinking with

¹³ Of course Hegel does not embrace a traditional formal account of concepts or conceptual determination. Nevertheless, we shall see below that he does endorse a more holistic and system-wide variant of conceptual determination and connects that account with agential self-determination, i.e. that of *Geist*.

having firm, individual thoughts. One is in the first instance—from inside of thinking, so to speak—not aware of thoughts at all. But once one turns thinking back on itself, the result is a kind of object—a thought. The tendency to reduce thinking to having thoughts is, nevertheless, endemic to reflection. Because reflection is not optional for thinkers whose nature and vocation is to think about thinking and because the very activity of reflection distorts any understanding of its source, Schlegel invents circumspect routines with regard to thinking calibrated to preserve a sense of its fluidity even in reflection. Irony is one such. It is an indirect deepening of the place of the finite subject in the plural world of experience, which is brought home within reflection by focusing not on thoughts stably individuated, but rather on the point of transition from one thought to another. But what is key for Schlegel is not what one might first suppose, i.e. that focus on transitions between thoughts yields a better sense of the ever more focused and progressive development of thoughts one after the other. Rather, Schlegel suggests that it is transition *as such* that is crucial, not because it provides a kind of knowledge but because it deepens reflective purchase on thinking as inherently diversifying and fluid.

Accordingly, subjectivity is not for Schlegel a state or property; rather, it is a 'task' (*Aufgabe*) that one can never complete. Experience goes on until death, as does the project of understanding oneself as both the focal point of that experience and as ontologically beholden to a source for the possibility of experience that cannot itself be experienced or otherwise known. I am in the world as long as I am in it and gain a variety of experiences and self-conscious perspectives on them and their interconnection, but at the same time I am one person, grounded as such, and strive for an overview of experience as mine that does justice to a unity I can only suppose grounds the possibility of any of my experience. One constant temptation here is to default to a scientific conception of objectivity in order to regain the requisite overview. But self-understanding on this scientific model, according to which one can so cognitively withdraw from the conditions of subjectivity that a completely third-personal view of the world opens up, cannot account for the experience of subjectivity. Idealism is not in the business of the elimination of subjectivity of course, but it does tend toward something like reduction of it in favor of a third-person perspective on thought and oneself. From Schlegel's point of view Kant and the later idealists are drawn in this direction, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. Kant is tempted rather bluntly to formulate basic problems of subjectivity in terms of conceptions of objects he takes to be central to the mathematics and physics of his time. The sole accommodation he provides for something like the absolute that is not presented in reified discursive terms is purely formal and ahistorical: the transcendental

unity of apperception. Schelling, although he attempts valiantly to reform scientific conceptions of nature in ways that are more amenable to the demands of self-consciousness, also falls into the trap. And, as it will turn out, Hegel, although not as interested in the sciences of his day, also crafts his thought to be able to answer the demand of an extra-subjective science. For someone convinced of Schlegel's basic view, the entire history of idealism is one of trying to do the impossible—to evacuate subjectivity out of an account of subjectivity.

Jena Romanticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

It is natural to commence discussion of Hegel's reception and critique of Jena romanticism by turning to the treatment he gives to it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The *Phenomenology* charts the development of philosophical conceptions through reconstructions of the kind of experience one has guided by those conceptions. Jena romanticism is nothing if not a treatment of the experiential dimension of adhering to a certain conception of the relation of subjectivity to the absolute. This parallel in concern of the relation between the run of experience and conceptions of the absolute strongly suggests the *Phenomenology* as a starting point for the investigation.

Hegel is committed to a thoroughgoing form of holism that operates along a number of interconnecting dimensions—epistemic, conceptual, linguistic, optative, affective, etc.—that dictate the terms of analysis by treating vast structures of meaning as primary cognitive vehicles. In order to commence consideration of Hegel's critique of romanticism it is necessary to have a working familiarity with what he calls a 'form' or a 'shape' of 'consciousness' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. A 'form of consciousness' is a large-scale cognitive and conative system that constitutes the developing self-understanding of those who hold the views it contains. One might gloss the idea of a form of consciousness by the rubric of a 'conceptual scheme' as that phrase was used in certain corners of Anglo-American philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s, and that is not entirely misleading so long as one builds into the idea of a conceptual scheme two aspects of forms of consciousness upon which Hegel insists. The first is that the scheme in question is not limited to what might pass nowadays as cardinal instances of cognition—belief, knowledge, theories, etc. Instead, a form of consciousness is comprehensive enough to include more pragmatic attitudes and behaviors associated with putting such doxastic materials into play, as well as much that is ordinarily categorized as 'feeling' or under headings like 'desire', 'hope', 'style', etc. Hegel denies that there is ultimately a strict divide between emotion or feeling and cognition. Second, following from this first adjustment, the scheme in question would have as

proper constituents collective forms of human agency like cultural and political institutions and products, as well as the forms of life they express. For Hegel these forms of consciousness instantiate a progressive sequence, in which human self-understanding, which he terms 'Spirit' (*Geist*), gradually perfects or 'realizes' itself.¹⁴

Each form of consciousness has an internal life, whereby it develops according to its core organizing dictates, which become more and more express within the form of consciousness. The engine of their becoming more express is the constant pressure under which the form of consciousness is put to fulfill its task of understanding the world. All but the very last and all-inclusive form of consciousness will fall short of this task and, when the native resources of a form of consciousness are exhausted in its attempt to retain its core commitments in the face of the recalcitrance of the world to submit to its understanding, the core commitments are most expressly present to the form of consciousness, maximally exposed for a critique from within. This deficiency presents itself in the form of a 'contradiction'. The meaning of 'contradiction' here is a good deal broader than the usual logical one; it means something like 'core insoluble incompatibility or incoherence'.¹⁵ For Hegel contradiction is not a conflicting relation between concepts or beliefs; it is, rather, an expression of the systematic inadequacy of the various elements in a form of consciousness taken as a whole. Contradiction, that is, is an artifact of a non-comprehensive background for a stable worldview. Terms like 'worldview' are unavoidable in this context, for there is a real sense in which the way that one is used to talking about very general cognitive and conative orientations on the world—e.g. as 'conceptual schemes', 'sets of beliefs'—is misleading in the context of Hegel's thought. Hegel of course does not deny that it is perfectly sensible on several analytic levels to talk about 'beliefs' 'desires', 'dispositions', 'capacities', etc. but he is insistent that one not mistake such terms for terms of *basic* philosophical discourse. The basic terms of such discourse, in the *Phenomenology* and other works, are those that have to do with socially and historically embedded agency engaged in a process of transformative change. Speaking of contradiction of beliefs, etc. is an expedient;

¹⁴ It is notoriously difficult to steer clear of misunderstandings of the term 'Geist' when translating it into English. I adopt what has become standard scholarly practice and leave the word untranslated.

¹⁵ Cf. our discussion of contradiction as it figures in Schlegel's account of philosophical fragments, in chapter one. Hegel's conception of contradiction must be a bit more focused on achieving logical results than is Schlegel's, but there is important overlap in their divergence from classical logical conceptions of contradiction. The precise sense of overlap will not be apparent until our discussion of Hegel's critique of romantic dialectic, later in this chapter.

such contradiction is a symptom of the metaphysically deeper sense of conceptual opposition that drives forth Hegelian dialectic.¹⁶

The presence of explicit contradiction to the form of consciousness—i.e. a contradiction known to be such from within the form of consciousness in question—amounts, then, to viewing the whole form of consciousness from within as inadequate to the rational demands on understanding the world that are immanent to the form of consciousness. At that point, the form of consciousness develops into another form of consciousness by the sheer act of recognizing as disabling its formative contradiction. This succeeding form of consciousness too is characterized by an implicit set of presuppositions that will be brought to light as contradictory, but these presuppositions will be in their content an advance on those of the prior form of consciousness. Hegel holds that these transitions from one form of consciousness to another are seamless (there are no leaps or gaps in the transition) and, at least in that sense, are ‘necessary’. Hegel’s account of conceptual change mandates that the context of the form of consciousness at its initial stage of internal development is *nothing more* than a result of recognition by the prior form of consciousness of contradiction within itself. The new form of consciousness is then an attempt to give a theoretical basis for the contradiction—to understand it as the product of conflicting basic assumptions and then change the assumptions—and, on that basis, to move progressively beyond the breakdown of the prior form of consciousness.¹⁷ Given this, particular attention must be devoted to the initial and terminal

¹⁶ Hegel deploys the concept of contradiction at two levels relative to his ontology. At the first level, the level in which phenomenology is pertinent, contradiction is the manner in which dialectical movement presents itself to the understanding, bound as the understanding is to subsumptive conception of concepts. It is indeterminate or simple ‘negation’ in Hegel’s technical vocabulary. One might think on this basis that Hegel would treat contradiction merely as such an artifact, but he does not do so, at least not precisely. When Hegel discusses dialectical progression from concept to concept from the point of view of what a Hegelian concept is, he speaks of opposition internal to individual such concepts, in terms of which they ‘go over into their opposites’. He terms this ‘contradiction’ as well, which he writes is the ‘root of all [conceptual] change’ (HW 6: 75; 74–80). Perhaps the most general thing one can say about what unites these two levels of discourse is that the idea basic to Hegel’s ontology that thought is ‘infinite’ requires that it must contain as a proper part of it contradiction. A second Hegelian proviso, that this infinity is harmonized, mandates that contradiction cannot corrode other parts of the infinity. Take these provisos together and a picture emerges, according to which contradiction retains much of its autonomy *qua* contradiction but is finally resolved into harmonic relation with the rest of thought by being sequentially progressive relative to making thought the infinite whole it is. This is Hegel’s version of Parmenides’ fragment: ‘τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι’ (‘for thinking and being are both the same’) (Diels/Kranz B3). In any case, in what follows we shall not distinguish between these two uses of the idea of contradiction unless it is necessary to do so for clarity of exposition.

¹⁷ The recognition in question can be implicit or explicit; as forms of consciousness develop in the series Hegel sets out, the recognition becomes more explicit. See the discussion later in this chapter.

stages of development internal to a form of consciousness, i.e. those stages that result in and from other forms under pressure from recognized contradiction. But since these initial and terminal stages are nothing but the immediate results of contradiction of antecedent and subsequent forms of consciousness, this means one must consider each and every form of consciousness holistically across the whole range of them. As in narrative, telling where one is at any present point in the story necessarily involves reference both to where one has been and where one is going.

This coarse, first-pass overview of some of the essentials in Hegelian conceptual dialectic helps to illuminate the form of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* that Hegel treats as underlying romanticism, what he calls 'Conscience' (*Gewissen*).¹⁸ Conscience is a sub-species of a more comprehensive group of forms of consciousness that Hegel denominates 'Morality' (*Moralität*) that have to do roughly with those aspects of Kant's moral philosophy that Hegel holds most important for the development of German idealism and romanticism, the idealistic reaction to those elements primarily in Schiller and Fichte, and the romantic reaction to these latter in Schlegel. Morality is subdivided into three subsections: (1) the 'Moral Worldview' (*die moralische Weltanschauung*), i.e. certain elements of Kant's moral philosophy that pertain to the relation between the empirical world and duty; (2) 'Dissemblance' (*Verstellung*), i.e. the improbity of such elements; and, most pertinent to our concerns, (3) Conscience, i.e. early idealism's and early romanticism's attempts to grapple with the problems they inherit from Kant's handling of the issues treated in (1) and (2). As the third, concluding element in Morality, Conscience has a twofold argumentative role. First, it must be, as are all forms of consciousness that qualify prior forms, a sublating (*aufhebend*) development of the prior one.¹⁹ But, over and above what one might call this primary sublating role, Conscience caps off the entire structure of Morality and so has a second, broader structural role in bringing that whole genus of forms of consciousness to conclusion.²⁰

¹⁸ I follow the standard scholarly practice of treating the names of forms of consciousness in Hegel like proper names and capitalize the initial.

¹⁹ Hegel's term is difficult to translate, and this Latin gloss has become somewhat standard. Sublation is a complex relation obtaining between two adjacent forms of consciousness (or in logic, 'Concepts'), although Hegel does at times use the term to refer to relations between classes of forms of consciousness (or of 'Concepts'). A successor form of consciousness sublates a predecessor form of consciousness if: (1) it determinately negates the predecessor form, (2) thereby transcending it as another form of consciousness, but (3) while also preserving within it is as the successor form the content of the predecessor form *qua* transcended. The Latin *sublatus* denotes something elevated from below.

²⁰ Hegel allots this status to several other forms of consciousness at earlier points in his presentation: Force plays such a role for the genus Consciousness, Unhappy Consciousness does

In order to fully grasp what is at issue in Conscience, then, one must delve into its roots in Hegel's understanding of a broadly Kantian problematic, treated in the prior sub-divisions of the Moral Worldview. Hegel characterizes the explicit theoretical self-understanding of Kantian moral philosophy as 'dissembling' (*Verstellung*) and uses this denomination to refer to the form of consciousness that instantiates it.²¹ The German verb 'verstellen' has several graduated shades of meaning that are pertinent to Hegel's ascription: 'to shift or move out of place', 'to adjust', 'to displace' and, more negatively, 'to misplace', 'to misadjust', or even 'to obstruct'. In what is nowadays the standard English translation of the *Phenomenology*, Miller translates 'Verstellung' with an ear tuned to the far end of the negative range, using the English words 'dissembling' or 'duplicity' interchangeably. The use of 'dissembling' accentuates intentionality: one might misadjust, displace, or even obstruct without intent, but 'dissembling' is willful dishonesty. The use of 'duplicity' reinforces and extends this intentional force and adds to it the connotation that the dissembling involves reversing the priority of two elements: being two-faced. The overall impression is of an improper shift of terms in their relation to one another and *shiftiness* in the shift, a meaning also covered by the cognates of the German term. The implication is that, in a highly developed and sophisticated theory like Kant's, there is infinite potential for vacillation within the confines of the theory; one can always turn to another of the seemingly endless internal resources for gap-filling within the theory, to the point of inducing something akin to a theoretical hallucination. This is accompanied by a hidebound refusal to question the assumptions of the theory. Once bitten one succumbs almost immediately; yet Hegel holds that, in virtue of internal critique, the Kantian will have to yield in the end. That end is romanticism.²²

so for the genus Self-Consciousness, and so on. Sometimes one and the same transition plays this secondary sublating role for both a genus and its sub-genus, as in the sections on Reason and Spirit. In fact, Conscience plays such a nested tertiary or quaternary role (depending on how one counts). It is easy to get lost in the architectonic complexities of the *Phenomenology*; we shall skip these details and raise the issue merely to point out the extreme systematic pressure Hegel brings upon Conscience.

²¹ HW 3: 453–4.

²² Judith Shklar places weight on the indirect nature of Hegel's critiques of Kant and Fichte in these sections—the philosophers are not called out by name and, at least in the case of Kant, Shklar does not think that the specific critiques are quite fair, preferring to cast the section as a more generalized critique of popularizations of Kant and Fichte, which are less philosophically rigorous and thus more open to attack. *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 181–3. She does not mention the romantics here (she deals with them as butts of Hegel's critique in earlier parts of the *Phenomenology*, but one might well think that Hegel would include Novalis and Schlegel especially among such philosophical pretenders, given his comments on them elsewhere in his work). Shklar is

In what does this dissembling or duplicity consist? Hegel holds that there is an inherent difficulty from the Kantian perspective of reconciling (1) the doctrine of the supersensible nature of the moral will, which takes no account whatsoever *in the willing* of whether the empirical effects of the actions determined by the willing are ill or good, with (2) the rational need, in Kant's estimation, to be able at least in principle to treat the empirical world as not hostile or indifferent to moral requirements. This is a problem for Kantian moral philosophy because, as far as one *knows*, it is entirely possible that one always in fact acts out of duty but turns out, due to contingencies out of one's control or knowledge, to do naught or even ill in the world. Kant well recognizes this difficulty, but the problem with Kant's thinking on this score, according to Hegel, is *not* that Kantian moral philosophy does not by its own lights successfully rule out such possibilities. The problem is rather what such possibilities *mean* to Kant, how Kant's moral theory reacts to the 'irritant' of duty gone empirically astray. (At its heart the issue Hegel joins is how Kant generally thinks about possibility, but we may keep things for now on a less than global plane.) Hegel's main complaint is that Kant's concern with the possibility under consideration, i.e. that the world might turn out to be indifferent or hostile to the empirical realization of the moral good, is hyperbolic. Kant cannot treat the possibility that duty done is not in the end rewarded despite the contingencies of the world as a permissible outcome of an ethical theory, because he imposes illegitimate idealized constraints on how a moral agent can think of herself as unified in her moral willing. Kant therefore devotes substantial theoretical resources to shoring up the integrity of the moral agent whose acts may misfire in this way—a stopgap host of transcendently necessary but merely regulative principles from the grab bag of discarded rationalist materials: God, the afterlife, and the *summum bonum*. All of these are targeted to justify, for the benefit of reason, the proposition that there is a possible metaphysical scheme

certainly right that Hegel is concerned, not just here but everywhere in the *Phenomenology*, with the general impact of philosophical views on the intellectual culture of his times, and he was certainly alive to the propensity of those views to be transmitted in watered-down versions, especially when the views concerned were of widespread intellectual interest. But Hegel's criticisms of Kant and Fichte in these sections are *not* mostly directed towards their minions; they are unmistakably pertinent to technical aspects of their respective forms of transcendental idealism and concepts of criticism. In fairness Shklar hedges her bets a bit on this score, claiming on behalf of Kant that if Hegel had focused on the *Groundwork* more (at least its first two sections), he might have modified or omitted some of his criticisms (p. 182). That is a complicated question. Hegel does in fact seem to treat the *Groundwork* in his earlier consideration of the categorical imperative in the *Phenomenology*, and that treatment, weak as it may be judged, is not uncritical to say the least. My preference is to see the indirect nature of the critique as a general methodology on Hegel's part. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel only very rarely names figures in the history of philosophy as targets; he is interested in the conceptual content of views in abstraction from who held them.

that makes the domains of the supersensible (moral willing) and the sensible (the empirical impacts of such willing) ultimately compatible. (It would not be entirely glib to call this the doctrine of ‘post-established harmony’.) What is ‘dissembling’ about this according to Hegel is that the Kantian is left with a necessary division between an internal sanctum from which ‘substantial’ ethical regard issues, on the one hand, and the external world (‘external’, that is, relative to the sanctum) in which action must take place but which the Kantian can consider to be substantial only to the extent that it is pre-configured according to the demands of reason as Kant conceives them.²³ It is not so much that Hegel rejects the idea that the world is bounded by reason and its demands—in fact, Hegel intensifies this requirement. Rather, Hegel rejects Kant’s conception of pure practical reason as inadequately radical. For Kant’s conception of pure reason is too proximate conceptually to his account of the understanding (or, the other way around, Kant’s conception of the understanding is just restricted pure reason). One must take care in drawing parallels between the understanding and pure reason in Kant for, as we discuss later in this chapter, the activity of subsuming particulars native to the understanding differs significantly from the more explicitly inferential, systematic activities of pure reason. Still, Hegel sees continuity in their commitment to binary determination. Hegel judges this formal discursive continuity between the understanding and reason to be merely an attenuated form of rationalism, in which all the problems of rationalism that Kant tries to avoid by limiting the epistemic reach of pure reason are visited back on him in subtle ways. Just as is the case with the understanding, pure reason must allow that what is given to it has a residuum that is strictly anterior to its proper functioning. In the case of pure reason, however, what is given is a *possible* being or state of affairs (God, heaven, etc.), the thought of which functions as a corrective, a consolation, or both for the purported irrationality of the prospect that demands of morality would go unanswered by the world. Citing Kant against himself, Hegel judges the convolutions of reason to be ‘a comprehensive nest of thoughtless contradictions’.²⁴ Hegel is not deriding the Kantian picture as sheer folly, of course; rather, the judgment that the Moral

²³ Shklar puts the point in a slightly different but compatible way: Hegel ‘hated...its [Kant’s theory’s –FR] vestigial Christianity and craving for a “beyond.”’ *Freedom and Independence*, p. 184. See also Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 192 (Hegel construes Kant, perhaps unfairly, as appealing to a *deus ex machina*). Taylor also stresses the recurrence of Unhappy Consciousness, as have we.

²⁴ HW 3: 453; cf. KrV A609/B637. The quotation is taken from Kant’s demonstration of the impossibility of a cosmological proof for God’s existence. Kant is referring there to the dialectical assumption (in Kant’s sense of ‘dialectic’) that undergirds the proof in his estimation. Hegel’s turning of the tables on Kant involves essentially charging him with dialectical insobriety.

Worldview is duplicitous reflects Hegel's admiration for the resources and internal power of Kant's thought, which one can consistently repurpose to ease the tension between it and worldly recalcitrance, and Hegel's estimation that the Moral Worldview is dialectically so advanced that it can explicitly point to its potential shortcomings. Because the Moral Worldview is so advanced an account of human freedom, and indeed close to Hegel's own account, the standards of probity that Hegel feels entitled to bring to bear on it are strict.

At perhaps its deepest level the Moral Worldview is hamstrung by difficulties that follow from what Hegel holds to be a very general and necessary structural feature at the intersection of Kant's epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics: the material of intuition and the form provided by a priori concepts are fundamentally metaphysically separate from one another. Conceptual mediation then takes a specific form in this Kantian scheme: particulars are subsumed under universals conceived as 'covering laws'. This, in turn, lends weight to the potential systematic mismatch between moral intent and realization of the effects of intent that, for Hegel, results in an incoherent account of the *experience* of ethical agency. And this is a problem for the Kantian, for while there may be structures in the world that do not depend for their coherence on their being experienced as coherent, Kantian freedom is not one of them. Even if, strictly speaking, a Kantian moral agent cannot *know* that she has acted from duty alone, autonomy demands determination of the will on the grounds of the moral law, and *that* must be done consciously and is supposed to result in a palpable sense of one's moral coherence.

Hegel holds that these difficulties are insurmountable so long as one remains within the Kantian enterprise—in essence turning the tables on Kant and accusing him of insoluble 'antinomy'—and judges romanticism's response to this deficiency in Kantianism to be successful at least insofar as it does not remain comfortably within that enterprise. Hegel treats romanticism, under the heading of 'Conscience', as an imperfect attempt to retain the idea of freedom as a form of 'self-determination' (*Selbstbestimmung*) while avoiding what he takes to be the pitfalls of a strictly Kantian account of freedom, which requires freedom to be freedom from determination by nature. Extending this general characterization, it is fair to say that for Hegel the success of romanticism lies in distending the Kantian ethical framework, i.e. in driving its core precepts to their limits, and in particular the idea that self-determination *of a subject by the subject* is basic to ethical well-being. This results in an increased philosophical clarity, a pointed but still philosophically indefinite awareness that *something* more than merely subjective self-determination must ground ethical well-being is on offer. The clarity in question here is of a very specific sort—the rather 'negative' clarity that comes

from running out of options. This clarity can obtain even if no adequate way forward is in firm view; this is not, indeed precisely not, the clarity one achieves at the conclusion of a successful proof. Clarity at concluding a proof is, among other things, part of a realization that the proof is a proof at all, i.e. that it is successful, and this illuminates the various relations in the proof. The clarity afforded by romanticism, by contrast, is the clarity gotten by exhaustively depleting one's resources in following through a plan and realizing, just because one faces up to the fact that the resources are depleted, that the plan does not work. The resource in question according to Hegel is the subjective conception of self-determination; the wall it runs up against is the necessity to appeal to more communal conceptions of freedom. Among other things, this general problem accounts for the transition in the *Phenomenology* from the genus of forms of consciousness denominated 'Spirit' to those encompassed by the designation 'Religion'.

But Hegel judges as well that there is a special form of incoherence at the conceptual core of romanticism. This defect is deep and philosophically informative just because romanticism is Spirit at terminal velocity.²⁵ Conscience in its various stages is nothing less than the death throes of the very notion that subjective self-determination can be 'substantial', in Hegel's way of putting it. Death throes are not of their nature peaceful, and romanticism to Hegel's mind is both a frenzied salvific activity of subjective self-determination and ultimately a resignation to the limits of that way of thinking about ethical well-being. It is true that romanticism was a contemporary competitor to Hegel's absolute idealism and that he was very keen to cast a harsh light on it out of philosophical self-interest, but he also appreciates that romanticism is particularly seductive. There is something appealing, perhaps even heroic, in the energy present at the end of a struggle. There is also something mesmerizing about a beautiful corpse. Hegel is concerned to put such dramatics in their proper place.

²⁵ Every form of consciousness that caps off an entire section of such forms has a built-up intensity that is the product of saving the central insight that typifies and unites the entire series it ends because the development within the series has become increasingly arduous in its overcoming of obstacles to that insight. A massive sense of loss attends such completion, and any view of Hegel as a 'triumphalist' has to contend with this astute aspect of his treatment of conceptual progress. Romanticism doubles down on this aspect of closing chapters in that it is so contemporary. Its sense of loss, Hegel no doubt estimates, is *our* sense of loss (and not a loss of what is well behind us in the history of concepts). This makes romanticism poignant along two dimensions. First, it is something that one is loath to let go, once one sees its advances on the Moral Worldview. Second, once one does let it go, the sense of what is gone is very sharp—one might almost say: 'romantic'.

A. Preliminary qualifications

As we have noted, it is exceedingly rare in the *Phenomenology* for Hegel to identify a particular form of consciousness or a part of such a form with a particular philosopher. This is not a matter of discretion on his part, but of principle. What interests Hegel is the internal integrity of global philosophical views and the connection of that integrity to what he takes to be a necessary sequential relation between forms of consciousness. In service of these interests, he knowingly idealizes the philosophical views under consideration, reconstructing them in order to generate what he takes to be their most integral and promising conceptual forms. This is not precisely ‘rational reconstruction’ as the practice is known in logical empiricism or in analytical philosophy more broadly. For it is a crucial part of the proof procedure of ‘phenomenology’ according to Hegel that it is possible that the view under consideration in its best form is not yet available to those ‘within’ the form of consciousness in question—i.e. to those who would endorse, at various stages either implicitly or explicitly, the claims central to the form. Phenomenology for Hegel is a form of immanent dialectical proof and of tracking forms of ‘total’ experience, a model that does not guide traditional conceptions of rational reconstruction in its deployment. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that Hegel’s project cannot help but be reconstructive, even if from an immanent point of view, and that this kind of idealization departs substantially from the romantic conception of *symphilosophieren*, a point we shall take up in more detail later in this chapter.

Because Hegel refrains on principle from naming names in the *Phenomenology*, it can become a parlor game to match up individual philosophers or schools of philosophy with various forms of consciousness. The sections ostensibly on romanticism are no exception, and there have been a number of suggestions as to who fills the various roles. Complicating matters, choosing someone for a given role often requires individuating that role in a particular way, with the result that different *dramatis personae* generate different structural partitions of the dialectic. Consideration of various such proposals in a way is illuminating, because many of the candidates offered are drawn from literary as well as philosophical circles; this can give a vivid picture of just how embedded Hegel’s thought is in the fast and furious developments of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, this sort of consideration tends to over-specify and thus distract one from the more general structure of Hegel’s idealizations, indexing them to less tidy and developmentally more complicated views of individual figures. In what follows I try to occupy a middle ground. On the one hand, I do not pretend to be painstakingly judicious in weighing the various proposals as to whose views are in Hegel’s sights at various

points in his treatment of romanticism and its proximate antecedents. Nor can I do justice to the internal complexity and difficulty of some of the views that I shall discuss. On the other hand, it is necessary to take some main historical line through the source materials that Hegel discusses in their *incogniti*. In what follows, I aim to take a non-controversial view of these sources in order to better convey the details of Hegel's handling of the conceptual issues at stake in romanticism. In fact, and true to form, Hegel never even goes so far as to use the term 'romanticism' when talking about the positions treated in 'Conscience'. To that extent at least my interpretation of the structure of his argument and the soundness of its conclusion relies on an ascription of views to thinkers—primarily to Schlegel—that is clearly external to the text. That said, that Hegel is talking about romanticism and Schlegel is amply supported by other statements in the *Philosophy of Right*, his aesthetics lectures, and his lectures on the history of philosophy.

I mention one further, related point. Because it is a form of consciousness that is quite close to what Hegel considers the final stage at which the viewpoint of 'the philosopher' and that of 'the form of consciousness' coincide, Hegel *more freely* reconstructs the form of consciousness he takes to limn the romantic *Weltanschauung* than he does other forms of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. This freer hand in reconstruction as a technical matter undercuts the immanent order of proof that Hegel often claims is at work in the *Phenomenology*. It seems that Hegel deviates in this regard self-consciously. There may even be a technical argument within the Hegelian framework that justifies the freer hand, viz. that, the closer forms of consciousness get to the 'absolute standpoint', the more self-consciously dialectical they are, and thus the less they are apt to be interfered with by 'external' argumentation. In any case, it is reasonably clear that Hegel does not take it that the romantics would understand their philosophical undertaking as he does, and that is because he takes himself to apply to their views philosophical resources that are not quite at their command. This still leaves the questions of whether (1) Hegel's philosophical diagnosis of early German romanticism is telling, (2) if it is not, whether that is an artifact of a misinterpretation of it or its conceptual resources, and (3) if it is such an artifact, whether the misunderstanding stems from Hegel's own doctrines.

B. The proximate historical and conceptual background of romanticism as Hegel understands it

As we have already noted, as a general matter Hegel holds that romanticism attempts to accommodate subjective self-determination in the wake of the inadequacies of Kantianism by reducing the role of conceptual mediation in its account of freedom. More specifically, the romantics attempt to substitute one

form of self-relation for another; instead of freedom realized through acting out of pure reason's abstract moral dictates in the form of laws, romanticism emphasizes the concrete, particular person as a ground for decision. The two views thus invoke competing grounds for ascription of moral personhood. For the Kantian reason acts through each of us, individually but *anonymously*. That is, pure practical reason is instantiated in the moral personality of each particular agent, and the ethical direction it affords to each agent is strictly and basically invariant because its 'voice', so to speak, is not one's own. It is the voice of no one in particular. Romantic subjectivity consists in the call of 'Conscience', by contrast, which is precisely *not* an anonymous voice, but rather one's own. What is at issue, accordingly, is not conforming one part of oneself (one's inclinations to act in specific ways) to another part of oneself (pure reason as it is present in one). Rather, clarity and conviction (*Überzeugung*) involves being as much oneself as one can be—reaching or projecting as an ideal a criterion of personal *purity* against which one can measure one's present subjective constitution.²⁶ Romanticism, that is, is an 'ethics of authenticity' according to Hegel, in which well-being is being or striving to be as true to oneself as is possible. This raises the question: if not constituted by an activity of self-determination under the rubric of law-like invariance, what is this form of self-determination and how might it establish ethical authority?

For the sake of exposition it is helpful at this point to advert to Fichte's ethical theory, in which 'conviction' and 'conscience' are central concepts.²⁷ Fichte's key

²⁶ See HW 3: 470–1. The terminology that figures in Hegel's discussion of romanticism teams with variants on the root *zeug*: *Überzeugung* ('conviction'), *Zeuge* ('a witness'), *zeugen* ('give evidence of'). This allows him, as we shall see, to connect etymologically ideas that he believes reciprocate: having conviction in *x* and submitting *x* to being witnessed; being convinced of *x* and being open to a process of persuasion and counter-persuasion with regard to *x*. Shared etymology allows Hegel to suggest in truncated formulation that the romantic conception of conviction only amounts to over-cultivation of personal viewpoints, which are too much the product of the conceptual hothouse of their breeding to be truly convincing (*über* [-] *zeugen*). Similar linguistic relationships are available to Hegel between the ideas of conscience (*Gewissen*) and being certain (*gewiß sein*). Sense-Certainty (*die sinnliche Gewißheit*) and Conscience (*das Gewissen*) thus share a common root.

²⁷ See *Sittenlehre* § 13 (1798), in SW IV, 156. Our focus on Fichte in the following is slightly non-standard. Several commentators take Jacobi to be the main target of these sections. In particular, several draw attention to Jacobi's novel *Woldemar* as a source and tacitly appeal to a continuity in Hegel's presentation running from the *Phenomenology* to the *Philosophy of Right*, where Jacobi is a mainstay. See, for instance, H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), pp. 479–80; Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik* (München: Fink, 1999), pp. 37–8; Ludwig Siep, *Der Weg der "Phänomenologie des Geistes"* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 211ff. For the later treatment of the issues, see HW 7: 245–86. Hegel of course was engaged actively with Jacobi's thought, as was every philosopher in the late eighteenth century in Europe. He has an extended, early treatment of Jacobi in the essay 'Glauben und Wissen' and many readers of Hegel understand Jacobi's 'naïve realism' to be the target of the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*,

deviation from Kant, and one that Hegel finds progressive, is that moral reasoning is not, from an agent's point of view, grounded in a general moral principle, such as a categorical imperative. Such a principle is, rather, a product of philosophical re-description, with merely regulative status.²⁸ Concomitantly, although the concept 'duty' plays an important role in Fichte's ethics, it is not the motive for moral decision. It rather denotes a ground moral agency from the standpoint of the *philosopher's* transcendental assessment, which assessment *may* be the basis for action (i.e. in a very philosophically highly developed moral subject) *or not*. Instead, for Fichte the experientially basic moral principle is to '*act always according to the best conviction of one's duty, or act according to one's conscience*'.²⁹ The 'or' here is best understood as setting off alternative formulations of the same principle, so that 'best conviction of duty' and 'conscience' are equivalent.

This role for 'conviction' *prima facie* seems to introduce into ethics a degree of contingency quite at odds with the hope to establish philosophically that ethics is objectively, or even intersubjectively, normative. We all have our own convictions, one might well think, and they do not necessarily, or even usually, intersect. Moreover, Fichte's measure of whether conviction is achieved, or conscience is clear, does not exactly quell the concern, i.e. coherence among an individual's total set of convictions. For one might well think that a coherent set of convictions can fail to be ethical. Certain conceptions of evil might especially fit the bill, e.g. an agent whose great coherence in malicious belief and action seem from his perspective to insulate those beliefs from criticism. But this is not the full story according to Fichte, for systematic coherency is only a coordinate marker of *nearing certainty* with regard to any particular conviction. One *feels* an increasing integration of oneself in terms of the ideal of the self-active, spontaneous I upon any contemplated act. When one probes conscientiously to bottom, one arrives at 'certainty', and this feeling of certainty is 'conscience' proper (i.e. the end of the process). 'Certainty' in this sense is both affective and carries Cartesian overtones. One cannot be mistaken that one feels conscientious nor can conscience in its fullness err. This staves off the possibility of evil of high conviction, if one

'Sense-Certainty'. In 'Conscience' Hegel even mentions in passing parallels to the 'Sense-Certainty' chapter, and this naturally encourages entering Jacobi's name on the list of the conscientious. The 'Glauben und Wissen' treatment is especially interesting in connection with Hegel's assessment of romanticism. He views the key work of Jacobi's for the romantics, *Woldemar*, as a kind of Faust narrative, where Faust comes out on top (HW 2: 386–8). I am emphasizing Fichte here in order to bring out more forcefully the Fichtean lineage, which Hegel also recognizes.

²⁸ GA I.5: 212. One might see Fichte as anticipating here Hegel's so-called 'formalism charge' against Kant's ethics.

²⁹ GA I.5: 146 (emphases in original).

assumes that at base evil cannot be a fully integrating source of self, if pushed to the limit of conscience, and indeed this is what Fichte seems to hold. One might have non-conscientious evildoers, i.e. ones who do not reflect on their internal moral constitutions. One might have partly conscientious evildoers, i.e. ones who do so reflect but only to a point at which their motives to not confront their inability to cohere if pressed further. But, one cannot have truly conscientious evildoers according to Fichte.

Fichte's arguments for these propositions are transcendental and result in an ethical rigorism of which the Prussian Kant could only dream—Fichte infamously does not allow for imperfect duties, for example. What saves this account from being overrun by reliance on moral affect is that Fichte contends that the process of seeking coherence among convictions necessarily involves rational consideration of moral courses of action. The overarching idea, then, is that reasons for ethical action are distilled through seeking coherence among them, which process focuses one on the integration of oneself in terms of universal reason. Because all rational entities have the same moral vocation, what may seem like an account that is overly concerned to allow for individual particularity in willing is also an account that vests a great deal in universal ethical reasoning. And, to fill out the picture, as we saw before Fichte also holds that this process is inherently intersubjective, engaged in pursuing reciprocal ethical (and political) recognition between agents through communication. This intersubjective dimension is a crucial link and point of departure between Fichte and the romantics, both in Hegel's estimation and in point of fact.

Leaving aside further technicalities of Fichte's view, it is possible now to contrast it more specifically with Hegel's understanding of Kantianism *cum* the Moral Worldview. As we mentioned, the Moral Worldview is the second of two criticisms Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology* of Kantian ethical thought. The first, which concerns the philosophical costs and benefits of thinking of moral obligation as grounded in a conception of law on close analogy with the conception of natural law in modern science, culminates in Hegel's famous claim that the categorical imperative is 'empty', and focuses on matters germane to the *Groundwork* and second *Critique*.³⁰ The Moral Worldview picks up this thread and discusses more concrete elements of ethical thought. Specifically, it consists of a critique of what Kant takes to be the regulative rational conditions of a possible unity of duty and happiness. The key works here are the *Religionschrift*

³⁰ See, e.g., *Philosophy of Right* § 135 Zusatz, HW 7: 253–4 and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, HW 3: 317–19. The best treatment of the 'emptiness claim' is Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 9.

(1793) and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), texts that all the German idealists knew very well.³¹ Again, as we saw Hegel is concerned to show that Kantian theories overestimate the philosophical import of the deviation of empirical aspects of agency from its rational moral compass, impermissibly generalize this possibility for deviation in a systematic way, and then unadvisedly over-correct for the slippage between the two by retrenching in rationalistic bridging principles between the domains of the empirical and the rational. Hegel takes Fichte to be a first step out of this quandary. The key is, again, the idea of ‘conviction’. When the over-sharp Kantian contrast between the empirical and rational domains wheels into view, it is natural to see Fichte as offering the process of conviction as a restatement of a doctrine dear to Kant, i.e. the ‘primacy of practical reason’. One result of this doctrine is that epistemic categories must give way to other forms of agency when moral claims are at issue. Fichte’s version of this is a structurally rigorous replacement of epistemic with deontic categories under the loose rubric of ‘feeling’. Kant often treats feeling as an empirical category, and feelings result from merely somatic or otherwise empirical causes as potential disruptions for agency involving pure practical reason. But Kant also allows that there are some feelings that result from rational processes and are, in this sense, ‘pure’ and non-empirical: three main types are the feeling of respect attendant to understanding oneself to have been bound by the moral law, the feeling of pleasure in the experience of beauty, and the feeling of humble uplift in the experience of the sublime. Kant famously denied, however, that one could be a moral genius—that feeling alone, even the extreme refinement of such feeling, could be a source of morality. The connection of feeling and conviction in Fichte treads this—for the Kantian—treacherous ground.

Conviction for Fichte is an activity or process of feeling, not an end-state. Its normative force is not supposed to involve the submission of the agent or feeling

³¹ When compounding the source materials for Hegel’s critique, it is important to recall that Fichte’s *Sittenlehre* appears in 1798 and is responding to Kant’s attempt in the *Religion* to clarify certain aspects of the relation of ethical motivation to character by means of the distinction between *Willkür* and *Wille*. Fichte did not write in light of Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, which appeared only after Fichte had completed work on his book (but before its publication). Moreover, unlike the *Foundation of Natural Right* (1796), Fichte’s *System of Ethics* is not reliant on his formulation of self-positing in the original *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), but rather follows the ‘new method’ he lays out in lectures of 1796–9. This new proof procedure—which made it much more patent that theoretical forms of rationality are dependent on practical forms—would have only been available to those who were present at the lectures, or read the newly written ‘Introduction’ to the second edition of the 1794 text. Hegel’s account of the emergence of Conscience out of the Moral Worldview operates with *both* an advanced understanding of the new method and its impacts on Fichte’s *Sittenlehre* and of Kant’s *Metaphysik der Sitten*. He, therefore, feels competent to craft a response to Kant from a Fichtean point of view that Fichte could not have made.

to law and the stabilization that such submission entails. This is so even though what are at issue for Fichte in moral deliberation are, regarded philosophically, duties. Conviction is rather a process of feeling more and more self-integrating, a striving for moral integrity. The agent accomplishes this by regressing on the set of total possible forms of conviction available to one in a situation that calls for moral thought. As one refines one's feeling of conviction, one *eo ipso* has more conviction, and is to that extent more moral. The process of refinement involves sifting out the extraneous matter of possible constraint as one looks deeper into the specific demands of the given situation. The given situation is not generic—it is *this* situation, which may in its demands be unique. This is where coherence comes into the picture. As less extraneous matter—less generic matter—is present in the set of possible responses to the situation, the more coherent the responses left over will be. The idea that Conscience is at base conviction under this description—that of an affective process of increasingly integrating oneself as an ethical agent by strict attention to the specificity and multiplicity of possible situations and responses to them expressive of the universal moral character at the core of all agents—is the key for Hegel's interpretation. Moreover, it is a fair rendition of Fichte's ethical thought as it stood in 1798.

C. 'Conscience' and self-determination

Conscience realizes that what seemed to the Kantian to be a strict divide between inclination and morality is actually an artifact of the Kantian theory itself. The divide is a product of distance from one's conscientious, and therefore own-most, desires, which distance allows for the intercession of other desires, whose purity is not secured by the sort of introspection that Conscience requires. The affective obstructions in question are *not* primarily imposed from without—physical obstructions, social obstructions—but rather have to do with inappropriately (i.e. non-autonomously) taking things to be determinative when they are not. Concern with self-determination as ethical freedom is, thus, at the root of the transition from Kant to romanticism according to Hegel. To become more authentic is precisely to shave away layer upon layer of inessential affect and thereby to arrive *not* at an intellectual law devoid of feeling, but rather at essential affect. Romanticism rejects by the means of the process of conscience the idea that all feeling without exception is deceptive as a putative source for self-determination. This is one sense, and a positive one, in which Hegel takes romanticism to be an 'aesthetic' philosophy. Introspective Conscience experiences itself as immediately unified by means of self-affection. While the Kantian achieves her sense of integrated moral personhood by attempting to align her personal beliefs and desires with impersonal reason, the romantic gains

in integrity to the degree that she uncovers within her concrete personal makeup her deepest convictions.

Although Hegel ultimately holds that the romantic conception of self-determination fails to be coherent because self-affection cannot provide a sufficient evaluative basis for self-determination, it is very important to note that Hegel does not hold that the incoherency of Conscience is superficial or at least not patently so—that it should be seen for incoherent right off the bat from within Conscience. Hegel after all takes Conscience and its subparts to instantiate an imperfect but perduring form of life; so, there must be some sort of apparent stability afforded by the thought that self-affection under some understanding can form the basis for self-determination. A main reason why Conscience does not result in an abecedarian form of outright relativism, Hegel holds, is that it juxtaposes what might seem to be an overemphasis on purely subjective ethical conditions with a conception of community through which each conscience recognizes a like resourcefulness in others. That is, conscience is a form of *recognition* (*Anerkennung*) that purports to be the basis for coordinated and ethically substantial social action. To the extent that each conscience is attempting to be true to itself and views other consciences as doing the same, it sets up a requirement to respect the results of these processes of self-discovery as expressive of pure intent. Constraint is not achieved by a system of recognition-rules *qua* laws, but rather by recognition of exemplary attempts to be genuine. This element of recognition is essential to Hegel's description of conceptual development within Conscience and to his final assessment of its conceptual resources as a whole. It is also what marks its advance over the Moral Worldview.

Nevertheless, it is a mistake, understandable though it may be, to deny *any* constitutive element of recognition to moral practice within the Moral Worldview.³² Perhaps on the face of it one might think that inclusion of the regard shown to or by others within a moral agent's grounding intent, even proleptically, would be the very definition of heteronomy for Kant. This is certainly true if, as in the romantic conception, recognition issues from the will of concrete personal agents. Such regard might even end one up in the kind of vanity against which Rousseau (and Kant following Rousseau) is constantly on guard. But Kant's moral theory does allow recognition something like a constitutive role for morality in the form of the 'Kingdom of Ends' formula of the categorical imperative (even if this is the merely ideal and supernatural notion of a

³² Cf. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 210.

conglomeration of wills in themselves).³³ In fact, this provides just the dialectical material one would expect Hegel to underscore: the reason why Conscience improves on the Moral Worldview is not that Conscience incorporates recognition into ethical subjectivity while the Moral Worldview has no concept of ethically constitutive recognition at all. Rather, Hegel places both views into a tripartite developmental structure of the career of the idea that recognition is an essential ethical concept. First, Rousseau finds concrete recognition ethically problematic in the extreme, given his conception of how the ideal and empirical aspects of the world can cohere in cases of moral judgment. Second, Kant follows Rousseau in rejecting empirically grounded recognition as ethically substantial, but has the philosophically more articulated resources of the idea of the 'in itself' in terms of which to partially rehabilitate recognition. Third, dissatisfied with this anonymous and other-worldly treatment of recognition, romanticism, since it has more developed resources of subjective authenticity than does Rousseau, can situate recognition in more concrete terms. Conscience is, accordingly, the 'completion' of the idea of recognition.³⁴

D. The 'Beautiful Soul' and 'Evil'

For argumentative purposes, Hegel posits two elements of Conscience that are in continuous interaction with one another, in terms of which he charts Conscience's internal development: the 'Beautiful Soul' (*die schöne Seele*) and 'Evil' (*das Böse*).³⁵ One way to think of the nature of these elements of Conscience is that they stand for different but interconnected expressions of authentic commitment. The Beautiful Soul is Conscience under the aspect of an attempted

³³ AA 4: 433–6.

³⁴ As Ludwig Siep puts it in his excellent *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes* (Freiburg: Alber, 1979), pp. 111–21.

³⁵ Hegel's terminology in these sections can be difficult to track. It is typical for the secondary literature to treat the Beautiful Soul and Evil as two different manifestations of Conscience and, on that basis, to treat them for purposes of analysis as opposites, i.e. as two opposite parts of Conscience. But this does only partial justice to the argumentative structure of these sections. It is better to view the relation of the main terms—'Conscience', 'Beautiful Soul', and 'Evil'—not as related in a simple triad, but as one main form of consciousness, 'Conscience', which specifies itself sequentially as the Beautiful Soul and then, as a version of the Beautiful Soul, as Evil. In the end structure there are two forms of Beautiful Soul in tension with one another. In order to mark this contrast we shall sometimes speak of (A) the 'inactive' or 'non-ironic' Beautiful Soul in contrast to (B) the 'ironic' Beautiful Soul or Evil. Hegel lays out this structure more clearly in §§ 138–40 of the *Philosophy of Right* (HW 7: 259–86), which offers a compressed reworking of these sections of the *Phenomenology*. There are slight differences in thematic approach and dialectical structure in the *Philosophy of Right* treatment, but they do not affect our discussion. For a discussion of the various uses of the idea of the beautiful soul during this historical period, see Robert Norton, *The Beautiful Soul: Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

reduction of ethical action to the inner sanctum of immediately pure moral intention. This is the aspect of Conscience that is conceptually primitive for Hegel, and the one he takes to answer most directly, one would suppose, to Fichte's position put forward above as the historical antecedent to romanticism in Hegel's estimation. It is important to note again that, in giving Fichte pride of place over other prime candidates for the initial stages of Conscience like, e.g. Jacobi, the interpretation of Hegel on offer underlines that the inward purity of moral intention is the result of an introspective procedure and not merely a naïve posture on the part of the ethical agent. The immediacy of conviction is an achievement, not a gift. (One might argue that this is true of Jacobi's position as well, if he takes *Glaube* to require the agent's clear articulation of the threat of nihilism, which in turn would seem to require an analysis of the philosophical and existential potential of systematic rationalism. Jacobi is ambiguous on this point.)

The conatus of the Beautiful Soul is to seek refuge from the world of action and judgment in a community. It musters what unity it can by ever more subtle reflection on the purity of its intent in and of itself, and this requires in Hegel's estimation that this inner world be purged of any potential frustration of that process. The key point is that the Beautiful Soul can only submit its thoughts to itself for validation in terms of authenticity—that is its form of autonomy. This is because inner conviction is all that it is left with once it rejects, quite properly, the idea that moral bearing is submission to a supernatural and wholly impersonal law or voice. So, although the Beautiful Soul is more ethically concrete than the Kantian moral agent, the price it now pays is an increase in the sense that the world of empirical contingency in principle can undermine ethical bearing, and a corresponding hesitancy to act.³⁶ Any 'world' worth its ethical salt would be one in which the only relevant ethical bearing would be entirely latent personal intent; a premium here is put on the pure potential to act, which one avoids 'spoiling' by actually acting.³⁷ From the point of view of the Beautiful Soul, *any* outward action is subject in principle to defeat in terms of its sought effect by powers outside the competence of the actor. This is romanticism at perhaps its most stereotypical—the garret-confined artist fated to be misunderstood by the community at large.

Evil is Conscience under the demand that it externalize itself in action.³⁸ Unlike the Beautiful Soul, Evil does submit its acts to the community, and does so because it recognizes, rather vaguely and indeterminately in Hegel's judgment, that ethical thought without action and, more importantly, without responsiveness to concrete others, is no ethical thought at all. Evil is, then, precisely not the

³⁶ HW 3: 472–3.³⁷ HW 3: 476, 480.³⁸ HW 3: 485–6.

unsullied Beautiful Soul; it is, one might say, the Beautiful Soul with an additional component. That component is *irony*. It is true that Hegel never uses the word 'irony' in these sections of the *Phenomenology*, but he makes it amply clear elsewhere that the Beautiful Soul *cum* ironist is Evil.³⁹ The main claim here is that Evil's social action is an advance on the wholly inward basic form of the Beautiful Soul but is still fundamentally deficient. The advance on the pure Beautiful Soul is that Evil at least recognizes the need to externalize its moral outlook. The deficiency in Evil is that the only form that its social externalization can take is peculiarly abstracting and hollow.⁴⁰ The particular sort of formality in question is forced on Evil. It is left to deal with the intractable idea that ethical thought is not only unresponsive to empirical contingency but afraid of it. All that Evil has in its initial conceptual repertoire with which to improve the situation is the indeterminate idea that it must adjust the Beautiful Soul towards the world of action in *some* way and, moreover, in some way that leaves intact as much of the Beautiful Soul's 'moral beauty' as is compatible with the change. More precisely, Evil meets the requirement that ethical action is substantial only if externally communicated by a combination of (1) pure display (without argument) of the person-specific nature of different points of view and (2) a coordinate decrease in commitment on the part of Evil to *any* point of view. The first component of this structure answers to a 'publicity requirement' of a given view. It is merely *posited* in social space, as it were, and the level of responsiveness to social reason is consequently quite low—with no argument for the position and thus only slight submission to the idea of constitutive social dialogue. Evil, initially, does nothing more than put its views 'out there' for public consumption—take them or leave them.

The second component is the one Hegel shows more interest in, because it carries the more dialectically progressive idea of moving away from the individual Conscience purified of the requirement of social expression.⁴¹ It registers an accommodation on the part of the Beautiful Soul as to the conviction with which the point of view is held. As we noted, Evil takes its position as an expressly social form of consciousness by *minimally* adapting the idea of authentic inward conviction in the direction of the cognitive distance afforded by explicitly social rationality. This minimal adaptation is for Evil to distance itself from all claims, *including its own*. So, ultimately, there are two dimensions to the second

³⁹ See, e.g., HW 7: 317–18 n; 11: 214–15; 20: 415–17. That of course does not entail that irony is the only possible or actual form of Evil. But it is reasonable to conclude that Hegel takes irony to be archetypically Evil.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hegel's discussion of the concept of moral genius. HW 3: 481.

⁴¹ HW 3: 491–2.

component: (A) Evil becomes minimally responsive to social requirements by *distancing* itself from points of view (the 'distancing requirement') and (B) this requirement holds for *all* points of view, including Evil's own (the 'universality requirement'). Now, one might think that the Beautiful Soul could try to act non-ironically. But that would be by Hegel's lights wholly ineffective, if at all possible. An 'acting Beautiful Soul' that kept the level of conviction in its points of view high and constant would insistently conflict with all others, Beautiful Souls or not. Irony is superior to the mere externalization of purity of intent; it does not insistently conflict just because it has backed off from commitment to the contents of its claims. It is to this extent more socially responsive. But what it has not backed off from is more important to Hegel's dialectical presentation: its insistence that the individual subject firmly controls the attitudes it takes in its views. This division of Conscience into the Beautiful Soul and Evil constitutes the conceptual beginnings of Hegel's analysis proper in the *Phenomenology* of the philosophical resources of early German romanticism.

But why then is the ironist 'Evil'? Initially it is worth noting that the nomenclature expresses a charge leveled at Evil by the non-acting Beautiful Soul. That is, the evil in Evil is an interpretation of the *active* Beautiful Soul by its inactive counterpart. To avoid losing one's way through these sections of the *Phenomenology* it is crucial to recognize that the relevant society here, over and against which Evil is taken to stand, is itself composed of beautiful souls and that, therefore, the social opprobrium that results in the charge of evil is tendered by the Beautiful Soul in its inactive, or non-ironic aspect as its understanding of its active, or ironic aspect. That is, the charge of evil is at the same time a form of self-understanding on the part of the Beautiful Soul, and more broadly on the part of Conscience, and an imperfect form of Hegelian recognition. What is evil about irony from the point of view of the purified form of Conscience does not have to do as much with purported moral depravity as with purportedly false claims of an unearned elevated status. Evil is 'evil' in the sense that Milton's Satan or Goethe's Faust is: the ironist sets herself above the very society she minimally acknowledges, holding herself out as cognitively superior to the run of the mill.⁴² She is the Beautiful Soul, after all, that has passed through the travails of pure Conscience and emerged with a greater degree of rational social awareness. The controlling idea in these sections is that there is a reciprocal

⁴² For Milton God's justification of his actions stems directly from his authority over all things, which are created out of himself, not *ex nihilo*. The program for Satan's rebellion, and the ground on which God counts him evil, contains the idea that angels are *self-creating*. It is hard to miss the pertinence to Hegel's view.

dependency between (1) Evil as an imperfect and still self-absorbed form of sociality that takes itself to be socially active even in its relegation of particular social norms to insubstantiality and (2) the Beautiful Soul as an even more imperfect form of sociality that is all but entirely detached from such norms because it is committed to the principle that activity of any sort spoils the infinite process of subjective ethical refinement. Given this reciprocity, the charge against Evil is both fair and unfair. It is fair inasmuch as Evil does present itself as socially active by discounting any lasting socially normative impact on its beliefs, even though this is the *only* way in which it is social, because it retains the inactive Beautiful Soul's compunction against ethical authority ulterior to one's honed sense of one's own authenticity. Evil may formally *expose* itself to the threatening determinacies of social judgment, but it still refuses to *submit* to them because of this residue of the inactive Beautiful Soul in its minimal idea of authenticity. This distance between exposure and submission is irony: Evil takes itself to be so sensitive an internal register of the flux of the concrete world that it regards any fixed view as 'stupid' in the original sense of the term—i.e. stultified. The world is most aptly 'captured', if that is the right word, in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of thoughts. The only invariant structure is that the thoughts originate in single subjects. More pointedly and accurately, all that the thoughts share is that they are *my* thoughts—nothing over and above that. But, from the point of view of the Beautiful Soul *generally*, i.e. of Conscience as a whole, that is what is most important: the thoughts—or, better, the transitions from thought to thought, the motility of thought—are part of a never-ending process of subjective refinement.

On the other hand, the charge that the active Beautiful Soul is evil is unfair, and it is so in a way that can escape notice because Hegel does not exactly highlight it. This is not necessarily because Hegel wants to bully about the ironist (though in the end that may not be far from the truth) but because Hegel views Evil as the advancing, progressive edge of the Beautiful Soul and, therefore, concentrates his attention on what he takes to be its leading idea—a Byronic or Promethean disregard of the very idea of convention.⁴³ It may be that the ironist is the

⁴³ I shall not comment at any length in this book on the complex question of the relation of German to English romanticism. Some philosophical commentators focus on that relation at great length. Much of the focus centers on Wordsworth. See Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism*, pp. 102–23; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 378–9, 419ff. The emphasis on the 'everyday' or 'ordinary' or more pastoral version of English romanticism seems to me to doom any analysis of Schlegel or Hegel's reaction to him. Whatever the deficiencies of Hegel's account, domesticating German romanticism in the direction of the elevated everyday is not one of them. It is much better to look to Byron's 'Manfred', Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound', or Blake's Urizen poems to get a sense of the demonic, heroic dimension of the ironist that Hegel presents as central to his argument. Great

connoisseur of his changeable self, but one has to remember that the charge of social infidelity comes from a community of beautiful souls, the members of which in their purported purity have an even lesser stake in social reasons. What the charge of evil expresses when one takes this into account is a felt lack of recognition on the part of the active of the inactive Beautiful Soul, that is, a pointed violation of the 'inner citadel' conception of authenticity. The externalization of the Beautiful Soul in Evil forces upon other beautiful souls a potential conflict of authentic views. That irony is involved might make one think that the conflict is softened by the defeasible attitude towards the standing content of the thought presented for social consideration. After all, from the point of view of the inactive Beautiful Soul dragged into the social sphere by Evil, that is less frontally challenging than assertion of determinate claims that might conflict without qualification with one's most deeply held authentic views. But that is apparently not Hegel's understanding of matters. What is uncomfortable about ironic activity for the non-ironic Beautiful Soul is not merely that there is some form of sociality in play. Hegel is quite clear that even inactive beautiful souls are not altogether isolated, even by their own self-understanding—they conceive of a community of beautiful souls on the order of moral monads. The regard shown by one inactive Beautiful Soul to another is a respectful, hands-off attitude toward the other's introspective quest for individual moral authenticity. Each authenticity will be singular as a whole, bearing the specific biographical imprint of the subject in question. Of course, one might still hope for some sympathetic overlap in the views arrived at, even if only a temporary and never fully refined one. But the key point is that the overlap, if there is one, is not the product of antecedent coordination on the part of subjects, nor does it require social expression. The insouciance of irony, then, is not only the social aspect it allows itself, but more basically the very idea that one stand out and call special attention to one's (admittedly) provisional thought. Evil is *notoriety*, and under the inert Beautiful Soul's understanding of matters, therefore *notorious*. For Evil does not merely hold that it *seems to it* that all claims must be held in ironic abeyance; it *asserts* that *in fact* all claims are indexed to purely individual endorsement. Irony in

attention to Byron especially brings out a devil-may-care component of romantic self-awareness. Even Mary Shelley's inferior *Frankenstein* is better on most of these scores. (Charles Larmore nicely singles out 'Mont Blanc' in this regard. See *Romantic Legacy*, pp. 11–12.) In other words, due attention should be paid to the darker aspects of Milton and English Milton reception. Hegel knew all these works well, refracted for him by Goethe's admiration of them and his own admiration of Goethe. But they could not have influenced the *Phenomenology* treatment of irony, which predates both 'Manfred' and 'Prometheus'. Of course one might still find that Hegel does not quite summon the sympathetic regard for these egoistic iconoclasts that Blake, Byron, or Shelley manage.

essence finalizes the duplicity inherited from the earlier forms of Conscience more proximate to Kant. It pretends to stand as a criterion for thinking by helping itself to a version of the very idea of conviction that it targets. Just when one thinks one is emerging from the thinning winter of Kant's ethics into the Jena springtime, there is a late frost.

The enmity between the inactive or non-ironic Beautiful Soul and Evil thus depends on the inactive Beautiful Soul's interpretation of its capacity to sustain a form of common society. On the face of the text, Hegel is far from clear on how the inactive Beautiful Soul can have even so much as the intent to express itself socially; the kind of intentional purity that the non-ironic Beautiful Soul holds dear would seem precisely to rule out any commonality between beautiful souls. The best that can be done with the claim is to supplement the official Hegelian account in line with our prior reconstruction. The non-ironic Beautiful Soul enters the social arena only with a *laissez-faire* attitude abetted by the formal requirement that the community permit each and every one to pursue her own convictions to the fullest. It is easy to see that this formal sense of community is the mirror image of irony, and that suits Hegel's dialectical purposes well. What one would expect is that the 'opposite' of the non-ironic Beautiful Soul's formal sociality would present itself both to itself and to what it opposes as an antithesis with an as yet unrecognized shared premise. So, opposite the sheer distance from thought typical of irony, one has the sheer closeness to thought as the glue of community. When one sees the conflict between the non-ironic and the ironic expressions of the Beautiful Soul as a battle over quite formalistic senses of what binds the community, one is in a very good position to appreciate more fully the nature of that conflict. The Beautiful Soul attempts to reject the thought at the heart of the Moral Worldview that the threat of an action not coming off as intended is a disabling condition on ethical life. This is what allows even the non-ironic Beautiful Soul to advance into the social arena in terms of a universal demand for conscientiousness. Still, as we noted above, *all* the non-ironic Beautiful Soul has to offer in this arena, in which it has its entire social 'self-confidence' (*Sebstbewußtsein*), is the thought that the community is composed of conscience-monads that may or may not share any of the contents of their own-most beliefs, desires, hopes, etc. This is fodder for irony, as Hegel well understands, which is fine-tuned to deny that sort of attachment to one's own-most thoughts. For the ironic Beautiful Soul what is most mine about my thoughts is that in principle I can *alienate them*—that they do not define me either by their content or by my degree of conviction in them. By putting into question the concept of conviction or authenticity at the heart of the non-ironic Beautiful Soul, irony threatens the already thin

understanding of the common sense that is the unsullied Beautiful Soul's only social achievement.

On this basis, Evil can in essence return the charge of 'hypocrisy' (*Heuchelei*) to the inactive Beautiful Soul, although it does so in a way more in keeping with its own ironic nature, i.e. in pointed jest.⁴⁴ For the non-ironic Beautiful Soul's sense of sociality is vanishingly minimal. What precisely would one have to do to *act* as the non-ironic Beautiful Soul? What sort of externalization of thought would be involved in such action? Evil can point out to the embarrassment of the allegedly unsullied Beautiful Soul that there is but a sliver of a difference between its self-enclosed, purist posture and its sociality. Acting in one way rather than another for the non-ironic Beautiful Soul is entirely unmotivated, for its only method of differentiating thoughts as to their value is an internal process of infinite approximation to absolute conviction. The ironic Beautiful Soul is thus free to make light of this form of 'action' as a *perpetuum mobile* of inaction. As it will turn out, Evil is not itself free from this very concern in Hegel's estimation. But at this juncture the dialectical point is that it is Evil that first raises such concerns, and that marks it as superior to the inactive Beautiful Soul.

It is, then, left to Evil to develop out of itself an understanding of its own deficiencies. How does Evil go from the idea that ethical action consists in self-imposed distance from all commitment, a view according to which commitment is *not* committing oneself to anything, to a more substantial account of self-determination and ethical commitment? Hegel's answer is that Evil comes to see itself as wanton, because the very activity of irony involves a form of judging, the conceptual instability of which is experienced by Evil in the very act of irony. For judging that no one thing is definitive when it comes to the self involves making a definitive claim to that effect, Hegel holds, and thus binds oneself to a norm. Now, one might think that the objection is simply that the ironist, in distancing herself from claims, is making a claim and is thus self-undermining. This is indeed part of Hegel's criticism, but the more intriguing dialectical suggestion is that the ironist conceptually connects her view that no set of beliefs or actions are definitive of the self, on the one hand, to an as-yet vague and underdeveloped sense of the weight of claims in the social environment that is *not reducible to subjective interrelation*. This is very far from a pointed recognition that one has been begging the question all along. It is also far from admitting the charge of 'evil' issuing from the inactive Beautiful Soul, i.e. that it is evil to act. It is rather a

⁴⁴ HW 3: 485. The charge of hypocrisy is initially leveled at Evil on the basis of its tacit recognition of a universal standard in making a claim, viz. that there are no such universals. See HW 7: 266 for a clear statement.

presentiment on the part of Evil of a greater form of agency for ethical action than subjective social agency—a form Hegel holds that romanticism displaces into its conception of the absolute or pantheistic religiosity.

This last point follows from very general conceptual structures that govern Hegelian phenomenology. Assume that I consider myself to be myself only in virtue of my ability to judge ironically (for the moment putting aside whether the concepts of ‘judging’ and ‘irony’ fit together in the way Hegel seems to take them to). Why should that lead me to value the non-ironic judgments of others? At best, one might think I would value others’ judgments just in case they too were ironic. But Hegel holds that *Geist* has an implicit understanding of its own demands for coherence that always outpaces its explicit understanding of the same. Hegelian dialectic is a process in which what is implicitly known becomes explicitly known by means of an increasing working awareness of the deficiencies in a knowledge claim. This picture ascribes to *Geist* an impetus to bring all that is implicit in its cognitive and conative bearing to light and, when doing so, not to rest satisfied when confronted with any contradiction but instead to view contradiction as productive of superior understanding and as indicating a need to press on. This idea that *Geist* has knowledge in advance of explicit understanding is joined with the further idea that this implicit knowledge is expressed structurally as an anticipation of what is to be made explicit. This anticipation has dialectical impetus, playing crucial roles in forms of consciousness in which pointed mutual recognition structures dialectical progression. Chief among these is perhaps Lord and Bondsman, but Conscience involves a species of recognition that is even more explicit. Against this general background, one way to understand Evil’s incipient social connection with the non-ironic Beautiful Soul is in terms of Evil’s dawning understanding that *all along* it has suspected that ironic judgment is inadequate as a form of self-constitution because it lacks the necessary social dimension. Evil wears itself out, becoming dissatisfied and perhaps even distraught, because its form of judgment treats nothing as valuable except the content-empty mere capacity to judge, come what may. This is Hegel’s way of doing justice to another stereotype of the romantic, i.e. that eventually what began as the triumph of novelty for novelty’s sake carries with it, in advance of yet another experience, the intimation that each ‘success’ is a failure. It is the form of melancholy specific to romanticism, as Hegel understands it.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The German and English romantics to a person read Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* with great admiration, as did Kierkegaard. The statement by the pseudonym Democritus Junior, addressed to the reader, that ‘I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy’ captures the above sentiment. *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 6th ed., ed. F. Dell and P. Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor, 1955), p. 16.

Accordingly, Evil sets itself the task of conceptually marrying the ironic and non-ironic aspects of the Beautiful Soul, overcoming the charge that it is evil by presenting its common ground with the non-ironic Beautiful Soul in a more advanced form of thought. Evil must seek this rapprochement through social action, since the necessity of sociality beyond individual subjectivity is what Evil has discovered. The question becomes: what form of social action might that be, in which these two aspects of the Beautiful Soul and of Conscience might be reconciled with one another?⁴⁶ And, given Hegel's general views concerning social rationality, this question in turn becomes: what form of recognition can cement the sought marriage between the non-ironic and ironic Beautiful Soul? Hegel's answer is: 'forgiveness' (*Verzeihung*).⁴⁷ Evil, which has been interpreted by the non-ironic Beautiful Soul as demonically self-aggrandizing and hypocritical, recognizes that charge and the truth in it. But, crucially, because Evil possesses cognitive resources superior to those of the non-ironic Beautiful Soul, it must take care not to preset the reconciliation in a high-handed way—a way that would be interpreted by the Beautiful Soul as just another smug ironic posture. Accordingly, Evil must present itself to the non-ironic Beautiful Soul in a way that unmistakably abrogates its superiority. Although Hegel writes that '[s]ein Geständnis ist nicht eine Erniedrigung, Demütigung, Wegwerfung im Verhältnisse gegen das Andere',⁴⁸ it is difficult not to understand Evil's actions, as they are presented to the non-ironic Beautiful Soul, as humble. Hegel captures this submission of the Beautiful Soul to itself (via the submission of the ironic to the non-ironic Beautiful Soul) by describing Evil as seeking forgiveness by giving its 'confession'.⁴⁹ Evil admits that it too is dependent on social structures to give meaning to its judgments. Of course, it does this having tested the probity of asocial judgment much more thoroughly than did the non-ironic Beautiful Soul, and that perhaps accounts for residual enmity on the part of the non-ironic Beautiful Soul. In any event, modulation away from superiority proves difficult, and the Beautiful Soul takes the humility of Evil to be merely apparent. This causes the non-ironic Beautiful Soul to stiffen even further its response to Evil and become the 'Hard Heart' (*das harte Herz/die Härte*).⁵⁰ In one of the most memorable passages in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel strikes an analogy meant to

⁴⁶ On the role of the concept of reconciliation in Hegel, see Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ HW 3: 492. ⁴⁸ HW 3: 490.

⁴⁹ HW 3: 489–90. One might think that here Hegel is tipping his hand a bit that the reader will soon be entering the territory of religion. That may be, but the words he uses are more juridical ('Geständnis'/'Eingeständnis') than theological ('Beichte'/'Konfession').

⁵⁰ HW 3: 490–1.

elucidate the case of the non-ironic Beautiful Soul's judging its ironic counterpart. He writes:

Es gibt keinen Held für den Kammerdiener; nicht aber weil jener nicht ein Held, sondern weil dieser—der Kammerdiener ist, mit welchem jener nicht als Held, sondern als Essender, Trinkender, sich Kleidender, überhaupt in der Einzelheit des Bedürfnisses und der Vorstellung zu tun hat.⁵¹

Hegel is making the point that the valet views the hero as unheroic not because of a superior insight into what is heroic, but rather because of the limitation of the valet's point of view. It is subservient, yet moralizing. It pretends to judge in terms of the universal (i.e. 'he is *no* hero') when all it can have in view are particularities (i.e. he is *one* who 'eats, drinks, and gets dressed'). So it is for the non-ironic Beautiful Soul and his 'false idol' irony. Thus, Hegel continues:

So gibt es für das Beurteilen keine Handlung, in welcher es nicht die Seite der Einzelheit der Individualität der allgemeinen Seite der Handlung entgegensetzen und gegen den Handelnden den Kammerdiener der Moralität machen könnte.⁵²

Eventually it becomes possible for the Hard Heart to credit the humility and to come to recognize itself in Evil. When this occurs, Evil ceases to be evil; forgiveness is reciprocally requested and granted. Evil has drawn the inactive Beautiful Soul out of its impossible self and into the light of the social space of judgment, and the Beautiful Soul acknowledges this. At the same time, therefore, this is also the renunciation (*Verzichtleistung*) of the Hard Heart, and Conscience comes to an end.⁵³

⁵¹ HW 3: 489. Hegel quite likes the example of the morally subservient valet, repeating it with variations in two other texts known to me, the *Philosophy of Right* § 124, where he both glosses and cites the *Phenomenology* passage (HW 7: 234) and the 'Introduction' to the second edition of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (HW 12: 48). Hegel's treatment of the master-valet relation is a reversal of a *bon mot* that goes back at least to Montaigne (*Essais* III.ii ('Du repentir')). For many of the sources, see the editor's note to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. Wood and tr. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 424 n. 3; cf. Tolstoy's treatment in *War and Peace* IV.iv.5. Hegel's riff on the scenario might also be a response to Diderot, whose valet sees the true man by seeing through the trappings of greatness. See *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1796). Diderot's novel was immensely popular in German-speaking intellectual circles due to Goethe's partial translation of it, which was available in 1785, earlier than any French edition. (The first appearance of *Jacques* in (1793) was a retranslation of Goethe's partial translation into German.) For Schlegel's very positive assessment of *Jacques*' depiction of the ethical superiority of valets (i.e. without the Hegelian reversal of emphasis), see LFr 3, 15; KFSa 2: 147, 148 and AFR 201; KFSa 2: 196–7.

⁵² HW 3: 489.

⁵³ HW 3: 492. The degree to which this account tracks Hegel's brief, earlier consideration of what he calls 'the beauty of the soul' (*die Schönheit der Seele*) in *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* (1798) is of much interest, but an adequate consideration of the topic would take us too far afield. There Hegel does not use the term 'evil' to describe the element of such a soul that detaches

Two Conceptions of Dialectic

These concluding sections of the Spirit grouping in the *Phenomenology* clarify what is at stake as between Jena romanticism and Hegel's thought circa 1807. What is firmly in play is the viability of individualistic conceptions of subjectivity—ones in which subjectivity is the fundamental condition in terms of which all other semantic structures are to be determined—as cornerstones of rationality. Romanticism is, in Hegelian terms, a 'philosophy of reflection', or philosophy of the 'understanding', driven to its limits, and at that limit, as Hegel holds is the case for all reflective philosophy, romanticism is shown in its own terms to be untenable because riven with contradiction at its basic level. That romanticism takes discursive concepts to provide the limits for rationality is true. As we saw, the best that can be done to indicate the absolute beyond these bounds is to perform second-order, still discursive operations on a discursive base in order to undercut the pretension that discursive thought uniquely constitutes the basis for subjectivity. Whether this renders romanticism incoherent apart from one's adoption of a specifically Hegelian standpoint is open to question.

To close in on answering this question, it is worthwhile to consider, from a vantage point internal to Hegel's conception of dialectical rationality, how and in what form dialectic is present in Jena romanticism. In this section, we shall be concerned primarily with Hegelian dialectic as it is present in the *Phenomenology*. This suggests itself strongly as a basic point of comparison given Hegel's characterization of 'science' there as the development of dialectic 'in appearance' and the romantic emphasis on the lived aspect of dialectic.⁵⁴ When Hegel states that the phenomenological manifestation of logic is 'Geist realized in time' (*der an die Zeit entäußerte Geist*),⁵⁵ he underlines this experiential dimension. ('Time'

from 'law'. There the forgiveness of the soul consists in the fact that what has so removed itself has no remaining ground for blame. See HW 1: 350–2. Connecting the *Phenomenology* treatment of these issues with Hegel's earlier theological writings brings home even more the dialectical position of Evil in the transition to Religion.

⁵⁴ HW 3: 72–5. Hegel, however, makes very explicit the great divide he sees between 'science' and the 'philosophy of intuition', the latter of which is 'as prevalent as it is pretentious' ('so große Anmaßung als Ausbreitung... hat'). HW 3: 74. It is clear that Hegel is targeting romanticism.

⁵⁵ HW 3: 590. I prescind from Hegel's further claim, stated in many places and in many ways, that (Hegelian) logic is God's thought and phenomenology the incarnation of that thought. See Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 180ff. for discussion. On a certain understanding of romanticism, which headlines its pantheistic secular form of Christianity, this brings Hegel closer to romanticism, as Craig argues. To repeat: I do not wish to deny that these are real, and even important aspects of romanticism and Hegel. But it is my view that a more modern appreciation will have to consider romanticism, Hegel, and the relation of the two in terms that are less history-bound than I take nineteenth-century conceptions of religious metaphysics to be.

here is to be understood of course as historical time, not merely temporality in the sense of a Kantian form of intuition.)⁵⁶ But, while the phenomenological form of dialectic provides the main point of contrast between Hegel and Schlegel, it will be important to keep an eye cocked to Hegelian dialectic in its 'pure' logical form as well. There are several knotty issues concerning the relation of Hegel's logic to his conception of phenomenology, not to mention other areas of his corpus. I hope that the contrast between Hegel and Schlegel can be made while placing to the side such difficulties. As we shall see there is an important additional 'formal' dimension to Hegel's criticism that is not present in the *Phenomenology* proper, although one can derive it indirectly from some of Hegel's statements in the Preface and Introduction to that work on the nature of dialectic. The criticism can be expressed in different ways, and we shall consider several, although not all, of these. The short form, vernacular Hegelian way to put the objection to romanticism, and Schlegel's views on irony especially, is that they are merely negatively and, therefore, indeterminately dialectical—i.e. they violate the Hegelian requirement that dialectic involve 'negation of negation' or, put another way, that dialectic involve determinate negation. As we shall see, it is important to understand this objection in its proper scope. For Hegel also holds, indeed he must hold, that all indeterminate dialectic is, unbeknownst to it, implicitly determinate.

We must first develop an understanding of the main features of dialectic as Hegel understands it. Kant's conception of transcendental dialectic⁵⁷ is as good a place as any to locate the roots of Hegel's conception.⁵⁸ The term 'dialectic' was developed in German philosophy in the generation just prior to Kant as one of a pair of terms that marked a division in logic between systems of rules of inference

⁵⁶ Accordingly, the temptation to draw too strong an analogy between the instantiation of Concepts in time and the Kantian doctrine of schematization should be resisted.

⁵⁷ Kant defines 'logic' as the science of the rules of understanding, and general logic as the logic of the employment of the understanding without regard to the nature or ontological status of its purported objects (A52/B76). Transcendental logic, on the other hand, specifies the rules of 'pure thought of an object' (A55/B80), by which Kant means an object that can be *represented* as an object—an object of cognition in general. Dealing with the laws governing thought of objects of possible knowledge, transcendental logic is neutral as to the particular empirical contents of thought. Kant also makes a distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' logic that cuts across the general/transcendental logic distinction just made. This distinction, which Kant inherits from late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century handbooks in logic, does not play an important role in his theory of cognition.

⁵⁸ As Michael Wolff stresses. See *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs: Eine Studie zur Dialektik Kants und Hegels* (Königstein: Hain, 1986); and 'Über Hegels Lehre vom Widerspruch', in *Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik. Formation und Rekonstruktion*, ed. D. Henrich (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), pp. 107–38. Unlike Wolff I do not wish to claim that Kant's conception of dialectic is the preemptive way to reconstructing Hegel's view.

involving ‘certain truth’ (*scientia de regulis inveniendi veritates cum certitudine*) and those involving ‘probable truth’ (*scientia de regulis inveniendi veritates probabilite*).⁵⁹ Kant adopts this terminology, but his conception of transcendental dialectic has nothing to do with the analysis of subjective probability; in fact Kant specifically warns against understanding transcendental dialectic in this fashion.⁶⁰ Kant argues that human reason has an inborn propensity to extend claims of knowledge past cognitive bounds;⁶¹ dialectic is both the tendency to do this and the analysis of that tendency. That dialectic comprises both the tendency and its analysis is unsurprising, as Kant holds that reason is the only source for its own limitation; if it were not, the rational critique of reason would be heteronomous. Accordingly, Kant defines ‘dialectic’ *both* as the ‘logic of illusion’ *and* as ‘the critique of dialectical illusion’.⁶² When reason breaches the bounds of possible experience, however, it is not merely mistaken. Because reason has an inherent and ineliminable tendency to disregard the requirement of self-constraint in its knowledge claims, its mistakes present themselves to uncorrected reason in forms that threaten to compromise it as a whole, i.e. they present as paradoxes. One form such paradoxes take is antinomy. According to Kant the solution of antinomies requires a shift in rational framework away from unyoked

⁵⁹ The most likely influence on Kant’s division of logic into analytic and dialectic is J. G. Darjes’ *Introductio in artem inveniendi, seu logicam theoretico-practicam, qua analytica atque dialectica in usum et issu auditorum suorum methodo iis commoda proponutum* (Jena: 1747), which Kant had in his library and read closely. Darjes’s division is based on an Aristotelian analysis of the character of syllogistic premises. See especially *Introductio in artem inveniendi*, ‘Praecognoscendorum’ VI, §212. What must have appealed to Kant about Darjes’s division of logic is the anti-Wolffian view that logic can be a *Methodenlehre* and not merely demonstrative.

⁶⁰ A293/B349.

⁶¹ Both general and transcendental logic can be dialectical. In its dialectic, logic displaces epistemology as first philosophy and considers its laws as both necessary and sufficient criteria for the truth of judgments about objects of possible knowledge. The laws of logic not only determine what form judgments about the world must take, they also prescribe the content of such judgments. As far as general logic goes, this would involve the (for Kant, false) assumption that what is thinkable under minimal and fundamental logical constraints is, in virtue of this status alone, knowable. General logic is insensitive to both the conditions under which objects can be represented objectively (the categories and forms of intuition) and the fact that any object that can be known is also presented in intuition. When we ask what dialectic means in terms of transcendental logic, things are more obscure. Since transcendental logic incorporates sensitivity to the bounds of knowledge within its very specification, it can seem difficult to understand how it could ever go wrong in the way Kant holds necessary for dialectical thought. But, if we take as a clue the general difference between analytic and dialectic worked out in terms of general logic—the mistake of treating merely necessary, formal conditions for knowledge as necessary *and* sufficient conditions for knowledge—it becomes a bit clearer how transcendental logic can be properly dialectical. Transcendental dialectic would involve treating the merely formal constraints on what could count as an object of experience in general as able to specify content. That is, it would be to treat the categories as specifying necessary *and* sufficient criteria for objectivity.

⁶² A61–2/B85–6.

pure reason to self-limiting reason; so long as there is no such shift, the terms in antinomy will seem to be contradictories.⁶³

Hegel in essence agrees with Kant that conceptual thought by its very nature rejects limitation, looking to extend itself beyond any *prima facie* insurmountable bound. But, against Kant, Hegel holds that this tendency need not be reined in; instead, one must understand this intellectual boundlessness as an expression of a deeper structure having to do with the ontology of the self. Once one admits this deeper structure of reason, one must develop a coordinately deeper conception of what a concept is (i.e. of what it is to have determinate thought). For Hegel, only such a conception can avoid the problems inherent in Kant's handling of the self-limitation of reason (i.e. positing things in themselves), just as Kant holds that only his transcendental idealism avoids the antinomies of reason.

A. Hegelian dialectic in its 'negative' and 'positive' aspects

Like Kant's transcendental methodology, Hegelian dialectic as deployed in the *Phenomenology* begins with a distinction between what Hegel calls the standpoint of 'natural' (*natürliches*), 'phenomenal' (*erscheinendes*), or 'ordinary' (*gewöhnliches*) consciousness, on the one hand, and the standpoint of 'philosophy' or 'science' on the other. Hegel draws this line in fact more strictly than does Kant. A Kantian 'deduction' begins with a premise that is not the conclusion of prior philosophical argument, and that states a purported 'fact', (*factum/Faktum/Tatsache*) from which the argument proceeds. According to Hegel, dialectic must be without presupposition and so cannot admit in this blatant way such 'factual' premises, although Hegel certainly allows that, relative to more local cognitive concerns and with suitably fixed background conditions, certain matters may be taken provisionally to be facts.⁶⁴ Hegel's final analysis of Kantian transcendental idealism, both as a methodology and a metaphysical position, is that it is precisely such a local context, albeit quite a philosophically developed one.

⁶³ Converting apparent contradiction into contrariety is the argumentative aim of the first two antinomies. The Third and Fourth Antinomy require a different approach, and it is that approach that is even closer to Hegel's strategy. See subsection B for a discussion.

⁶⁴ If Karl Ameriks and Paul Franks are right that *facta* in Kant are correctly understood as 'made', and not as merely 'given', the division between Kant and Hegel on this issue is not quite as stark. See Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 256–7; and Franks, *All or Nothing*, pp. 278–9. As far as Kant's account of pure practical reason is concerned this point seems well taken, but I am not sure that extending it to the theoretical sphere (e.g. 'experience' as a *Faktum*) does not read too much Fichte back into Kant. In any event, it is important to note (as I discuss later in this chapter) that the criteria for a well-made 'fact' for Hegel are considerably more robust than for Kant—nothing less than inclusion in a total system of possible meanings.

Hegel writes that dialectical philosophy shows human self-understanding in its ordinary, everyday form to be ‘nugatory’ and ‘false’. Dialectic is accordingly experienced by such self-understanding as something imposed upon it, that disquiets and ultimately dislodges it, and, therefore, that causes it to feel a sense of loss.⁶⁵ Moreover, the loss in question is the loss of self; dialectic is thus the ‘way of despair’ (*der Weg der Verzweiflung*) and of ‘doubt’ (*des Zweifels*), in which what was thought to be self-confirming and, on that count, a basis for ultimate self-orientation, is revealed to be compromised and riven by self-contradiction.⁶⁶ Hegelian dialectic is for these reasons inherently disillusioning for *Geist*, much as transcendental dialectic is for Kant’s pure transcendental subjectivity. But this negative, skeptical function of Hegel’s dialectic is only one of its aspects. As is Kant’s treatment of dialectical reasoning, Hegel’s account is calibrated to more positive, pedagogical purposes.⁶⁷ The negative results of dialectic with regard to ordinary consciousness (in Kant: with regard to pure reason) are nothing other than the process of *Geist*’s self-formation or -education (*Selbstbildung*). Ordinary consciousness becomes increasingly more explicitly dialectical, which is to say that it becomes more philosophically attuned to shortcomings in that portion of itself that rests content with non-philosophical self-understanding, or, more bluntly, it becomes more philosophical.

Hegel claims this development of *Geist* is stepwise, progressive, and, moreover, ‘necessary’. We shall come to discuss the sense in which Hegel might mean the process to be ‘necessary’ below. For now, it is important to mark a more general and abstract feature of the account: that the progression in *Geist* is a matter of its gaining *both* superior intellectual resources for self-critique *and* an increased motivation to criticize. The latter need not follow from the former; one might even think that increased knowledge would cause one in certain circumstances to entrench in the *status quo ante*—perhaps if the truths discovered were very disorienting. Hegel’s preferred way to talk about ordinary consciousness’ cresting philosophical awareness of discrepancy is in terms of the concept ‘self-contradiction’. *Geist* abhors self-contradiction—a claim for which Hegel never argues—and its increased success in undermining what it had taken previously to be settled self-understanding intensifies the conatus in it to push further and

⁶⁵ The loss in question is necessarily retrospective, but Hegel holds that it is not nostalgic. He takes this to be an important difference between romanticism’s cognitive relation to discarded ways of viewing the world and his own.

⁶⁶ HW 3: 72–3.

⁶⁷ Raymond Geuss, in his teaching in the 1980s and early 1990s, stressed the importance of taking very seriously this pedagogical dimension of Hegel’s thought.

deeper in this direction. In other words, the more *Geist* develops, the more it is impelled to do so.⁶⁸

Recall that the conception of contradiction Hegel deploys in his account of dialectic is not the traditional logical one. Dialectical contradiction is not the conjunction of a term (or claim) and its negation. The idea that contradiction consists in such a conjunction requires that the term in question (and its negation) be determinate, a point we canvassed above in our discussion of Schlegel's conception of irony. (If one prefers to think of contradiction as a speech act involving assertion, the same follows.) This requirement presupposes that the term is not subject, relative to its inclusion in the contradiction, to significant internal development of its meaning. Terms in contradiction must have stable contents. If the terms in conjunction were always developing internally, a fixed contrast of their contents would be impossible; awareness of the contrast of the terms by means of comparison of their content could never yield a clear negation of either content. As we shall see, Hegel claims that all concepts are always internally changing their contents, and indeed that it is essential to them that they do so. Thus, the traditional logical conception of negation, and therefore of contradiction, does not capture the conception of contradiction at the heart of Hegelian dialectic. (To the contrary, Hegel analyzes the traditional logical notion of contradiction as an under-specified form of dialectical contradiction; but that is another matter.) In the domain of phenomenology, the contradiction in question resides, rather, within forms of consciousness, that is, within *prima facie* relatively stable and orienting 'worldviews' or 'total theories'. The two

⁶⁸ One might hold that Hegel does not defend the claim that *Geist* is always motivated by being faced with dialectical contradiction to press further because he does not make it in the first place. The idea here would be that overcoming contradiction may be a motor for progress from within forms of consciousness that are responsive, because relatively dialectically underdeveloped, to something approaching contradiction as it is traditionally understood, or performative contradiction. But this does not mean that Hegel, from the philosophical standpoint, asserts that *Geist as such* requires contradiction to be abhorrent and, therein, a spur to its further development. Instead, one might claim that Hegel holds contradiction itself to be a mere surface indication of 'paused dialectical movement' that impels *Geist*. It is just part of the meaning of *Geist* that it develops this way; contradiction is just part of that structure. I take it that this is what Heidegger has in mind when he intimates that, once one grants Hegel *Geist*, the rest follows. See 'Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung', in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 1950), pp. 111–204. If one takes this radically non-epistemic view of Hegel's project, where the negative element of dialectic expresses in contradiction is already destabilized, Hegel and Schlegel will be closer than is typically thought. I take it that this is more or less the position, expressed differently, of Catherine Malabou, *L'avenir de Hegel: plasticité, temporalité, dialectique* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: l'inquiétude du négatif* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), which deploy Heideggerian resources in attempts to counteract Heidegger's relegation of Hegel.

elements of a form of consciousness in contradiction are: (A) the consciousness of its *objects* (the ‘in itself’) and (B) the consciousness of its mode of access to, or *cognition* of, those objects (the ‘for itself’).⁶⁹

Logic differs from phenomenology in terms of the medium in which such dialectical reasoning and demonstration take place. In phenomenology the medium is ordinary understanding, and its inherently imperfect and non-philosophical purchase on questions of ontology and epistemology involves the experience of contradiction because philosophical rationality has to ‘win through’ the imperfect medium. Progress is charted in partial terms—the more contradictions have been overcome at various levels of native cognitive resources, the more philosophical reasoning has displaced ordinary reasoning. (In Hegelian logic, by contrast, the medium is already purely philosophical—it does not have to travel the path of phenomenological travail.) Contradiction in phenomenology exerts an internal pressure on the coherence of thought that one seeks to relieve by deepening one’s theories; it tokens slippage between what one thinks is settled knowledge of the truth and the emerging sense that it is not so. In Hegelian logic one is not so much deepening one’s theory of conceptual relation as internalizing by recollecting (*erinnern*) a depth already attained.⁷⁰ In investigating logical structure one is rehearsing the holistic interconnection of all basic concepts, an interconnection essential for establishing the content of such concepts and for tracking their transitions one to another. This is not mere repetition (*Wiederholung*) of antecedently well-formed concepts and their interrelation, but formative of both. Still, one doing Hegelian logic need not experience the torturous necessary passing away of one concept to make room for another as a cognitive deficit one faces as a matter of experience. One need only exercise speculative reason to simultaneously constitute and observe the connection. ‘Science’ does this directly whereas phenomenology must display and develop science indirectly in ‘appearance’.⁷¹

⁶⁹ HW 3: 76ff.; see also the discussion earlier in this chapter.

⁷⁰ This idea of recollection is one of the main transitional devices between phenomenology and logic for Hegel. Hegel uses the term in the concluding sections of the *Phenomenology* when canvassing the appropriate cumulative act of retrospection of all prior forms of consciousness on the part, now, of the conjunction of the natural standpoint and the philosopher’s standpoint (they have coincided in virtue of the completion of the series of forms of consciousness). HW 3: 590. Key here is the idea of internalization—as Hegel puts it ‘going into itself’. Rather than an intuitive grasp of the innermost, Hegel nominates the memory of the experience of the reflective ‘path of despair’ for the deepest sense of *Geist*’s being ‘at-home-in-the-world’. This sort of memory forms the basis for Hegelian logic.

⁷¹ HW 3: 72–5.

B. Hegelian dialectical ontology

This basic epistemological and ontological framework in Hegel's conception of the self is well known, but its measure is often not taken at its deepest structural point. One typical way to investigate how dialectic functions as the basic form of self-understanding begins with Hegel's claim that the self is a process of self-formation through self-*determination*, a process in which *Geist* forms itself step by step by coming to understand its nature in contrast with what is taken to be other than it. On its face this may seem to be an anodyne experiential application of Spinoza's dictum that 'determination is negation' (*determinatio negatio est*), but in fact it informs the peculiar overall ontological structure of Hegelian dialectic.

The first thing to note is that Hegel treats Spinoza's principle as strictly universal, but beyond this reformation Hegel gives the idea more than one ingenious turning.⁷² One can formulate one important twist in terms of Kant's epistemology and its relation to his theory of reason. For Kant 'understanding' is the capacity for determinate thought, where the conditions for determinacy are provided by rules, that is, by schematized concepts, which group what is given to thought according to relations of similarity and difference. A concept so understood has no function of discrimination between the individuals determined under it; the concepts 'male' and 'female' play no role in the determination of an instance of the concept 'Berner Sennenhund', for example, to which they are both applicable. Determining concepts are, in this sense, homologous. Moreover, such concepts are binary, in that they either do or do not apply to a given particular. They rule in or out candidates for determination; there is no middle case. Hegel allows that this view of concepts is adequate enough for use in the empirical sciences and cognate theoretical areas, but holds that it will not do as a philosophical account of conceptuality in general. The semantically stable concepts of the understanding are, for Hegel, only snapshots, as it were, of a more dynamic and basic rational process. These concepts 'of the understanding', as Hegel terms them, are concepts in suspended animation. For Hegel, concepts fundamentally are *moving* determinations, i.e. processes of semantic development. Each and every discrete concept accordingly tends to violate its own determinate limits so completely as to pass over eventually into its 'opposite'

⁷² See HW 4: 434. Hegel's work is replete with acknowledgements of the positive impression Spinoza's dictum left on him. For a recent treatment of Hegel's conception of negation relative to Spinoza, see Yitzhak Melamed, "'Omnis determinatio est negatio': Determination, Negation, and Self-Negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel", in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 175–96.

(*Entgegengesetzt*).⁷³ From the perspective of semantically stabilizing determination, this process will yield a contradiction within the (now extended) concept's content. In that sense, contradiction for Hegel (even Hegelian contradiction) is an artifact of conceptual movement, as that movement intersects with demands for contextual conceptual specificity. Hegel holds ultimately that any specific determination is only determinate relative to a single and entire process of actualizing all possible determinations. Take a fundamental philosophical concept for Hegel, say, 'freedom'. There is no such thing as freedom *simpliciter*, only freedom in relation to possible stages of development: 'freer than' 'less free than', etc. Only when the complete process has exhausted itself is there a stable specification of 'freedom', i.e. its complete developmental transit.

On the face of it, this can sound like the function of a Kantian Idea—an immutable source for potential complete determination—but the resemblance is only partial. Kant holds that Ideas are idealizations projected by pure reason for its own use (or abuse); he explicitly denies them any direct, constitutive function in cognition in favor of a regulative one. Hegel rejects this merely regulative role. The idea of 'the greatest possible thought' cannot, as Kant has it, be indemonstrable yet semantically necessary, for that would take such thoughts outside the purview of what Hegel calls 'science'. At this point, it might seem that a Hegelian would insist simply that Kant commits a category error. The idea here would be that Kant inappropriately models speculative thought—the Idea—on determinate, subsuming thought—the concept. An Idea is merely the maximal instantiation of the latter—a single, static, most comprehensive concept. Under the rubric of transcendental idealism, such concepts would have to be considered ill formed relative to experience because experience requires an epistemic limitation to which Ideas are not subject. Kantian Ideas do not possess any connection with what can be given in intuition by means of which to group them according to their shared 'marks' (*Merkmale*);⁷⁴ Ideas are both unschematized and unschematizable.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, framing the purported advance of Hegelian over Kantian dialectic as the resolution of such a category error results from an oversimplification of Kant's position. It is true that Kant defines an Idea as a concept transcending the possibility of experience, which is formed from

⁷³ See HW 8: 172.

⁷⁴ The best account of Kant's treatment of the conditions of conceptual determination is still Robert Pippin, *Kant's Theory of Form: An Essay on the Critique of Pure Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) (see especially pp. 108–12).

⁷⁵ The reason for marking this distinction here is that pure concepts of the understanding (i.e. the categories) can be deployed without reference to schemata, but they of course can be schematized. The latter is not true for Ideas. At best, Ideas have a 'hypotyposis', i.e. through symbolization. See AA 5: 351–4.

‘notions’ (*Notionen*), i.e. pure concepts of the understanding, taken as unrelated to pure sensibility.⁷⁶ And, in section 3 of the *Jäsche Logik* he states flatly that ‘[a]n Idea is a concept of reason [*Vernunftbegriff*], whose object can be encountered nowhere in experience’. But, as a note to section 3 clearly shows, the internal structure of such a concept is quite different from that of a concept of the understanding.⁷⁷ An idea is not merely a pure concept of the understanding transposed into one of pure reason along the standard lines of human finite discursivity. Put in the terms of the first *Critique*, Ideas are the ends of a systematic syllogistic reasoning process directed toward increasing the scope and power of empirical theories by setting an ideal of total comprehensiveness.⁷⁸ Total theoretical comprehensiveness can only be posited as a rational ideal if it is modeled cognitively as the arrival at transcendent and absolutely grounding principles. These principles are the Ideas. So, an Idea contains within it not merely the structure of a covering law for thought, but a structure of (at least possible) conceptual parts reciprocally related to one another and to that whole. An Idea, then, is more akin to a theory or conceptual array than to a single a priori concept raised to transcendent status. This structure of Ideas, which Kant discusses at length in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, receives a reformulation and extension in the two Introductions to the *Critique of Judgment*, the later sections of the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgment’, and the ‘Critique of Teleological Judgment’. The *Critique of Judgment* had a powerfully positive reception in the development of German idealism, especially on Schelling and Hegel.⁷⁹

Hegel’s claimed improvements on Kantian dialectic cannot, then, rest on a simple critique of the Kantian conception of an Idea. Rather, Hegel attempts to intensify the dynamic nature of the Kantian Idea for deployment in his own

⁷⁶ A320/B377. ⁷⁷ AA 9: 92 and n. 2.

⁷⁸ For a reliable discussion of the idea of dialectical illusion in its more negative aspect, see Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). An unjustly overlooked study is Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Rüdiger Bittner, ‘Über die Bedeutung der Dialektik Kants’ (PhD diss., University of Heidelberg, 1970) is a gem of concision.

⁷⁹ Scholarly interest, especially in the case of Hegel, has tended to focus on sections 76 and 77 of the third *Critique*, and not specifically on the account of dialectical ideas. See, for example, the excellent Eckart Förster, ‘Die Bedeutung von §§ 76, 77 der *Kritik der Urteilskraft* für die Entwicklung der nachkantischen Philosophie’, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 56 [2002]: 169–90, 322–45. See Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), for a treatment of the overlap in Kant’s and Hegel’s views along the aesthetic dimension of reflection. Rudolf Makreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) is an exercise in reverse engineering, which argues that there are romantic and Hegelian elements of interpretative cognitive orientation embedded already in Kant.

dialectic by claiming that antinomy expresses an inherent and non-illusory aspect of *all* thought. In saying that the structure of all conceptual arrays (of sufficient systematic organization) is antinomian yet not illusory, Hegel does not mean to convey that progress from one concept or conceptual array to the next does not involve a process of disillusionment; rather, he means that the process is not limited to a special set of metaphysically suspicious concepts or derivations. For Hegel, concepts by their very nature comprise internal contradiction, and their deployment in forms of life will yield an experience of this contradiction. This experience is not a distanced recognition that there is a contradiction at play; rather, as the concept is used, and as one's life is lived in accordance with this use, contradiction becomes a form of action that is lived through. This gives an intensified sense of the dynamic nature of concepts because it installs in the very structure of the concept an antinomian 'motor'. The resolution of such contradiction, as is the case with Kantian antinomies, involves recognizing a more comprehensive background for the concepts in conflict, such that what seem like contradictions at the given level of analysis actually reveal the lack of conceptual background. To be more precise, Kant divides the antinomies into two classes, 'mathematical' (the first and second antinomies) and 'dynamic' (the third and fourth antinomies). A mathematical antinomy is overcome by showing that both the thesis and antithesis positions are false, and thus that what seems like contradiction is contrariety. For Hegel, however, both the thesis and the antithesis are true, depending on relevant contexts, which is closer to the way Kant treats dynamic antinomies. Hegel's conception of the scope of the needed context is both more constrained and more radical than Kant's. It is more constrained because the context is provided by a next better specification for the co-tenancy of the claims rather than by a generally applied epistemic agnosticism. It is more radical because as a matter of phenomenology such contexts are provided by diachronic conceptual schemes arranged in an allegedly necessary progression. There is no *ἅπαξ λεγόμενον* in Hegelian dialectic, as we have noted; all that can be 'said' is said relative to context. The proper philosophical attitude toward contradiction is, then, not to see it as a conceptual deficiency that must be put down, but rather to welcome it as a positive developmental vehicle.

This intersection of the concepts of antinomy and of self-determination provides one point of access to the deeper ontological dimension to Hegel's dialectic. There is marked disagreement among commentators concerning the relation of dialectic to ontology: some commentators forward 'non-metaphysical' accounts of Hegel that interpret dialectic as providing a theory of the basic elements of human conceptuality; others view dialectical logic 'metaphysically',

i.e. as providing a theory of what there is.⁸⁰ For our purposes, it is not necessary to enter into the evergreen debate between metaphysical and non-metaphysical interpretations of Hegelian dialectic, but it is worth noting going forward that there is one thing at least on the side of the metaphysical reading. On Hegel's analysis, it is essential to thought that it always attempt to surmount its limit; thought is not primarily the having of determinate thoughts, but rather the essential passing of any seemingly discrete thought into another. What is central to thought, that is, is its internal movement. One might then extend this view and add that thought essentially surmounts any fixed distinction between *itself and its object*—i.e. that thought would (properly) treat the thought/world distinction, like the distinction between one thought and another, as pliable and relative to context. On this understanding, Hegelian dialectics mandates treating any notion of an object that is apparently divested of all thought of it as (A) always implicitly having the structure of thought in itself and (B) as but a median point of analysis, which dialectic will overcome, incorporate, and elevate (*aufheben*) in the course of development. This is the deeper point about dialectic mentioned before: thought for Hegel is inherently and perpetually in transition; it is a process of continual becoming.⁸¹

This characterization of the structure of dialectic as essentially a process of the movement or constant becoming of concepts, if left unqualified, may seem deeply

⁸⁰ The distinction between metaphysical and non-metaphysical (in some instances, called 'categorical') interpretations of Hegel was first made explicit in Klaus Hartmann, 'Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View', in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 101–24; however, J. N. Findlay's *Hegel: A Re-examination* (New York: Collier, 1958) is to my knowledge the first in the line of contemporary scholarship on Hegel to identify the issue in these terms. Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) are in their different ways proponents of the non-metaphysical interpretation. The metaphysical reading is more traditional and there are several variants. A monumental study in this vein is Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein. Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1980); see also Hans Friedrich Fulda, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and Michael Theunissen, *Kristische Darstellung der Metaphysik. Eine Diskussion über Hegels 'Logik'* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1980); Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Robert Stern, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge, 2002). Taylor, *Hegel* charts a middle ground: Hegel intended dialectic to be metaphysically 'real' but that is best understood as a way of defending a philosophical position, which can be detached from Hegel's metaphysics, that Taylor calls 'expressivism'. It bears remembering that there were many non-metaphysical Hegelians in the proximate historical wake of Hegel's teaching. See John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Warren Breckmann, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁸¹ See HW 3: 18–19.

un-Hegelian, even romantic. For it is also boilerplate Hegel that dialectic is teleological, as statements like ‘the *beginning is purpose*’ (der *Anfang Zweck* ist’) attest.⁸² The slogan might imply at least three things, arranged here in the order of escalating stringency: dialectic is *progressive*; it is *necessarily* so; and it comprises *a single closed system* of necessary progression.⁸³ As to the first, least restrictive, criterion, the generative process (i.e. the process of becoming) builds upon itself at each of its stages, yielding more comprehensive and, therefore, more optimal concepts or forms of consciousness along the way. Second, the internal criticism of one stage in and of itself uniquely instantiates the necessary and sufficient condition for the next stage. That is, successful internal criticism of a form of consciousness will demonstrate from within that the central precepts of the form in question are in fact given sense by and dependent on a further, more comprehensive set of precepts, which more comprehensive set just *is* the next form of consciousness.⁸⁴ There is not something that must be added to the recognition of dependency in order to transition to a new form of consciousness; the recognition is one and the same thing as the ascendancy of the new, more optimal form.⁸⁵ But this is merely half of the story, for Hegel must also hold that the transition is ‘necessary’, in the sense that it is the sole possible resolution to the conflict induced and recognized in dialectical critique. There are neither any intermediary ways to resolve the conflict nor any alternative and equally adequate resolutions. These first two conditions taken together levy substantial constraints on core conceptual change, but the third condition is yet more robust. The entire necessary progressive series is not only univocal—which is vouchsafed by the first and second requirements—but complete and closed. There is an end to the progression, and that end is not just its point of cessation, but something towards which it has been directed all along, i.e. a ‘goal’ or ‘purpose’ (*Ziel*).⁸⁶ Among other things, this means that the apprehension of the necessity governing transitions between forms of consciousness lower in the line of progression is inferior to that governing successive forms of consciousness and to that governing the entire system. More pointedly, as the contents of forms of consciousness progress in adequacy, an important part of their increasing adequacy consists in their

⁸² HW 3: 26.

⁸³ See HW 8: 52–3, 59–60; cf. HW 3: 17–18, 78–80. Perhaps Hegel’s most ringing declaration of the importance of closure (and of necessary closure) is his statement ‘the true is the whole’ ([d]as Wahre ist das Ganze’). HW 3: 24.

⁸⁴ HW 3: 78–9.

⁸⁵ Thus, the origin of a new conception of the object of knowledge and a new conception of access to such an object is not posited intentionally; it happens, as Hegel writes ‘behind the back of consciousness’ (HW 3: 80).

⁸⁶ HW 3: 73–5.

becoming more explicitly and internally aware that they are dialectical. In very advanced forms of consciousness this articulated awareness of dialectical structuration approaches the intellectual specificity and depth that Hegel ascribes to dialectic full stop. Whether this relation of whole-system to discrete-stage necessity results from a strongly *de re* metaphysical necessity opening from whole to part or is the product of philosophical retrospection will be, again, a matter of debate, one that we need not enter into in order to make the relevant contrast between Hegel's and Schlegel's conceptions of dialectic.

The combination of (A) *teleology* with (B) an ontologically driven epistemology that takes *becoming* to be as basic as being—which takes movement to be the sole deep structure of thought—raises problems of coherence within Hegel's account. The second aspect tokens what one might call an existential dimension in Hegel, for which the concept of essence seems non-basic, while the first aspect seems to repudiate that priority in favor of some brand of essentialism. Hegel is aware of this tension and holds that science must accommodate both aspects by reconceiving the nature of an end or purpose of an ontological system. Unlike Schlegel's conception, which seems more Kantian in its openendedness, Hegel adopts a conception of the end of the system that on its face is somewhat Neo-Platonic, having systematic closure as a main desideratum. Hegel attempts to marry (A) and (B) above by holding that the system *is its own end* because it demonstrably contains all possible basic forms of consciousness (or, in Hegelian logic, of 'Concepts'). The systematic end is emphatically *not* a final, *static* point at which an ultimate principle or entity is shown as a first cause or most general covering law; it is, rather, nothing more or less than the complete series of forms of consciousness in necessary relation with one another. The systematic closure is like that of the circumference of a circle. If one grants Hegel the account of intrinsic necessity that governs the series of forms of consciousness or concepts, in which necessity at every transitional point consists in ruling out any possible alternative succeeding formation, the entire series of forms can be considered complete when there are no possible remaining alternatives—when all other possible views have been 'refuted'.⁸⁷ This is, then, not completion in a terminus *ad quem*; it is rather that the series is perfected or entirely 'filled out' (i.e. constitutes a *τελειώσις*).⁸⁸ This is why Hegel holds that one might start

⁸⁷ HW 3: 27–8, 73–4.

⁸⁸ See HW 3: 54–5. This conception of necessity (and of possibility) is quite different from Leibniz's, Kant's or modern variants in Kripke or Lewis. It is precisely *not* the idea of charting necessity in terms of invariance across possible worlds. Necessity is a matter of what is intrinsic in a thing gaining full expression, an account closer to certain Greek conceptions of *ἀνάγκη*. Thus, it does not at its deepest level concern regularity, and certainly not any modern conception of lawlikeness.

anywhere in a completed dialectical structure and end up with the same demonstration of the singular holistic integrity of the whole of science.⁸⁹ Wherever one starts, one will come back to that point as the end; what was the beginning is the end, and the structure is shown to be closed and to preclude any alternative when it returns to that same beginning.⁹⁰ For Hegel holds that 'science' is teleologically primed from the outset ('the beginning is purpose'), that the series of forms of consciousness are necessarily ordered and exhaustive, and that the end of science is necessary as well.⁹¹ The necessity in fact undergirds from the beginning even the philosophical approach to science, before, that is, 'fating' science to be initiated and ultimately fully instantiated.⁹² Hegel can seem to treat what he calls 'Absolute Knowledge' like a final form of consciousness, but this invites misunderstanding of its nature as an end and, in the bargain, of the transition between it and what precedes it.⁹³ It becomes clear in the section on Absolute Knowing that there is no new content over and above the realization that the entire preceding process is as a whole necessary and thus exclusively all-encompassing. What marks off the *Phenomenology* from the *Logic* on this score is that phenomenological proof must start from a point of least experience and, thus, that *qua* phenomenology, conceptual dependence on the whole system of concepts is not *experienced as* circular. The proof would not be adequate if one started with, say, Lordship and Bondage and not Sense-Certainty. But after the phenomenological process is complete, and thus no longer obscured by the need to develop logical grasp historically (i.e. 'in appearance'), one may start anywhere and demonstrate the completion of the system *qua* logic. It is in this sense that *the end of the system itself is movement* and so does not violate the precept that thought is always moving. For, once one moves through the whole series, and, thus, once the *wholeness* of the series is instantiated, the series loops back on itself; the philosopher is then free to abstract from the historical presentation and do logic, retracing the series with full knowledge of its necessary connection

Schlegel's notion of imaginative possibilities is closer to the Kantian model. That said, there is one crucial difference that may be expressed in fashionable rubric of 'possible worlds'. It is often unremarked that, while there may be no inherent difficulty in thinking of a possible world in which Fred Rush lacks the properties or predicates he has in the actual world, there is a problem *for me* of imagining *me* in such a world. The whole structure of possible worlds requires third-person identification. But the first-person is what Schlegel would require.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., HW 3: 590.

⁹⁰ A particularly lucid account, which is in many respects similar to the one presented here, can be found in Forster, *Hegel's Idea*, pp. 170–4; see also Michael Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. F. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 130–70.

⁹¹ HW 3: 74.

⁹² HW 3: 80.

⁹³ HW 3: 575–91.

throughout. In this enterprise, the philosopher no longer needs further dialectical forms of consciousness to be demonstrated as a matter of internal movement. She is rather placed in a position external to that development, from which it can be seen in full view. To adopt a metaphor from film: before reaching Absolute Knowledge, one is restricted to a narrow focus on the form of consciousness that one is in relative to dialectical contradiction, and an emerging sense of both the deep impact of the contradiction and the hope of its reconciliation in some higher form. One does have a *partial* purchase on past dialectical connections, but a much weaker one than that provided at the end. On the other hand, in Absolute Knowing one has it all 'in wide angle'. Any consideration of one transition, or one internal development in a form of consciousness, now proceeds against the background of the whole series. The experience of conceptual movement is then all the more vivid, as one comes to see that content can be stable only relative to the whole. The whole, that is, comes into view both as the whole of movement and as the only stable 'entity'.⁹⁴

C. Claim-making, contradiction: self-determination revisited

We are now in a position to contrast Hegel's conception of dialectic with Schlegel's. In making the contrast, we must keep an eye fixed on the developmental conception of dialectic at work in Hegel's phenomenology.

What is striking at the outset is the common ground. Both Schlegel and Hegel hold that forms of consciousness are inherently mobile and that their content and individuation depend upon the dialectical position of those forms in a group of such forms.⁹⁵ Moreover, in forms of consciousness that have a high degree of

⁹⁴ Alternatively, one might put matter as follows. Hegelian Concepts self-maintain by striking equilibria between their for-itself and in-itself components. These equilibria are not static points of repose but are rather internally kinetic—they are under constant pressure from developments within an individual Concept (or form of consciousness) and obliquely present within the individual Concept relative to the complete series of such concepts, which series Hegel also at times calls 'The Concept'. Any single Concept, form of consciousness, then, or limited group of the same only attains equilibrium, accordingly, relative to its developmental station. Overall equilibrium consists in, as we have discussed, exhausting all possibilities—where 'possibility' means single or limited group forms of self-maintenance. The form of exhaustion is actualizing and then discarding (but preserving as discarded) these possibilities. Only the total structure of all possibilities in sequence attains complete balance.

⁹⁵ For convenience and ease of expression I adopt the more Hegelian way to talk about general conceptual structures, i.e. worldviews, as 'forms of consciousness' in speaking about both Schlegel's and Hegel's positions. This is permissible, I take it, because both Schlegel and Hegel treat the meanings of terms and statements holistically and hold that the relevant holistic context is given by something like communities or 'forms of life'. Moreover, both Schlegel and Hegel assume that it is entirely proper to include both conative and cognitive elements as constituents of forms of consciousness, in part on the grounds that there is no strict separation of the two. But I do not mean to suggest that there are not substantial differences concerning the 'identity conditions' of such

reflective articulation, that dependence can manifest as responsiveness to other forms of consciousness according to their relative places in the group or groups of such forms. Schlegel and Hegel also concur that cognitive tension involving opposition of content or attitude toward that content is constitutive of forms of consciousness. It is 'constitutive' in two interlocked senses. First, the tension is intended to account for conceptual development (or movement) within forms of consciousness. Since forms of consciousness for both Schlegel and Hegel just are this movement, the tension is structurally basic to any form. Second, both Schlegel and Hegel claim that such tension accounts for the transformation of one form of consciousness into another, so that the tension is basic to movement between such forms. Formally, both of these constitutive functions of tension are extrapolations from Reinhold's and Fichte's views concerning the minimal a priori structure of consciousness. But Schlegel and Hegel agree as well—through their different critiques of early German idealism—that one must extend the model of productive opposition to intersubjective cognitive and conative structures. Further, and again because of their criticisms of Fichte's own brand of dialectic, both Schlegel and Hegel argue that no classically or transcendently deductive conception of dialectic is ultimately philosophically sustainable, because no such conception satisfies what they take to be the stringent criteria governing what can count as a proper philosophical ground. Schlegel and Hegel are ardent anti-foundational thinkers not only because they reject the particular conception of a ground in early idealism but also because the very concept of grounding in a single, immobile first principle is suspect. Hegel's rejection of Schlegel's conception of dialectic hinges on an issue narrower than any of these: Hegel's negative assessment that irony is a structurally advanced yet ultimately incoherent form of dialectical rationality.

Hegel's critique of irony presents itself superficially as diffuse and ad hoc, a mixture of personal animus and an overtly simplistic form of the charge that irony cannot constitute a form of critique because it is self-stultifying. Perhaps, as Judith Shklar suggests, it expresses an antipathy toward the Jena writers' *hauteur* in thinking that they could better classical models by disassembling them and putting them back together in their own, romantic terms.⁹⁶ If Hegel's critique bottoms out in such charges, it is easy to deflect with equally broad counterpronouncements that Hegel's view of irony is a simple case of special pleading against romanticism, which presupposes precisely the teleological conception of

elements between the two thinkers. For instance, one way to express Hegel's basic criticism of Schlegel is that irony fails as a unifying structural device for forms of consciousness.

⁹⁶ *Freedom and Independence*, p. 132 and n. 98.

rationality that romanticism seeks to reject. We have gone some way in showing the greater depth of Hegel's account of irony—and of other strategies of romanticism more broadly—in assessing his treatment of the Beautiful Soul and Evil in the *Phenomenology*. But the disagreement of Schlegel's and Hegel's approaches to core philosophical concerns is more interesting still when one presses past broad Hegelian statements concerning the power of irony as a form of criticism to the differences between Schlegel's ironic conception of dialectical reasoning and Hegel's non-ironic one. This more structural discussion of the relation of Schlegel to Hegel (and of Hegel's understanding of that relation) makes vivid how close and, yet, how far from one another their philosophical impulses are. Because of the terse and schematic way in which Hegel engages romantic irony, one must present a reconstructed view on his behalf. One potent way to attempt to bring out the most basic philosophical dispute between Hegel and Schlegel relevant to their differing conceptions of dialectic is to deepen the focus on the topic of self-determination. We shall first revisit the role Hegel assigns to contradiction as a primary vehicle for gaining greater self-determination and then investigate whether such contradiction need play a role in Schlegel. This will require, in turn, a discussion of the relative role that *assertion* or *making a claim* (*Behauptung*) plays in Schlegel's and Hegel's rival conceptions of dialectical rationality. This later discussion is in fact an amplification of a point made previously.⁹⁷

We saw that neither Schlegel's nor Hegel's account of dialectic involves classical logical contradiction, i.e. the conjunction of a claim and its negation. Hegelian dialectical contradiction is more akin to either (1) opposition in the sense of contrariety or, more fundamental, (2) apparent opposition on account of unsupplied background considerations. But even this is not the most fundamental thing one can say about the difference between Hegel's conception of dialectical contradiction and classical logical contradiction. As we also noted previously, one cannot conceive of Hegelian dialectical contradiction either as a specification or a more replete form of logical contradiction because the elements of a form of consciousness (or of the concepts of Hegelian logic) want for the determinateness necessary to qualify them as 'terms' in the logical sense. Contradiction in Hegelian logic and phenomenology is a process in which forms of consciousness or concepts are given more content by being placed in ever more comprehensive conceptual frameworks. Forms of consciousness or concepts are made more precise, that is, by means of an extreme form of whole-system contextualization. They do not, therefore, present themselves as such in contradiction as stable and fixed, as would be required for logical contradiction classically conceived. The

⁹⁷ See note 12, this chapter.

point is simple, but can be missed due to the baroque complexities of Hegelian dialectic: indeterminate elements cannot be in a relation of logical contradiction. For Hegel, discrete forms of consciousness or concepts, aside from their final holistic specification, are only relatively determinate, and that means that any contradiction between elements of forms of consciousness or between concepts will also be relative. For Schlegel by contrast, there is no complete graduated string of contradictions and so nothing but relative determinacy of terms throughout.

It is possible then to frame Schlegel's ironic conception of dialectic as involving an even more radical form of conceptual tension than does Hegelian dialectic, one that not only departs significantly from classical notions of contradiction, but also from the contrariety masked as contradiction or suppressed background assumption that is characteristic of the passage of Hegelian dialectic through its stages. So understood, Schlegel's conception of dialectic would not deploy the concepts of contradiction, contrariety, or of stability relative to a closed holistic context *at all*. Notwithstanding this, Hegel's own dialectical procedure constrains him to treat irony as an impoverished form of specifically *Hegelian* dialectic—as we saw in our consideration of the *Phenomenology* treatment of these issues—and it stands to reason that this evacuation of contradiction as a form of tension (i.e. synthesis) that fuels dialectical movement will be a major source for his critique of irony as a form of dialectic. By Hegel's lights irony deploys a *wholly* indeterminate and, therefore, *wholly* unproductive form of negation, one that does not 'negate negation', in Hegel's way of speaking, i.e. one that does not result in stepwise more comprehensive forms of critique and knowledge. Schlegel is well aware of this feature of irony, and we shall have to evaluate in the discussion that follows whether Hegel's charge that indeterminate negation of the scope upon which Schlegel insists is undialectical (i.e. dialectically incoherent) is well founded. Likewise, we shall have to assess Schlegel's claim that romantic 'poetry' is 'progressive' in light of Hegel's understanding of it. But it is important to recognize as well that one might perceive the particular form of Schlegel's refusal to accord contradiction univocal and cumulative progressive force as *less* radical than Hegelian dialectic. As we have also noted, it is a central feature of Schlegel's account of all the imaginative cognitive routines he champions as ways to model the elusiveness of the absolute that he cleaves to a standard Kantian conception of concepts and their application conditions. Concepts for Schlegel can only be discursive and subsumptive, and it is against that background that he develops his account of conceptual limitation and indirection. By contrast and to repeat, Hegel holds that the concepts 'of the understanding' are secondary structures, impoverished, 'one-sided' specifications of fully dialectical Concepts, which are neither subsumptive nor discursive in any traditional sense.

Against this backdrop, there are several possible ways to structure Hegel's criticism of romantic dialectical theory, and of Schlegel more specifically. Hegel's charge that irony is self-defeating is from a more philosophically technical standpoint a charge that the romantic account of dialectical rationality is insufficient. Hegel takes himself to be in possession of an account of dialectical rationality that is, in its 'positivity', superior. One might cast the superiority in question as one of being able to show that what appears to be contradiction at the heart of a form of consciousness or Concept—the juncture at which one cannot help but hold both a core view and its opposite—is conceptually reconcilable. Schematically, the contrast is not difficult to present. The two parts of irony that are implicit and explicit (i.e. withheld meaning and the apparently plain meaning) seem correlative to the two components of forms of consciousness that Hegel takes to be so (i.e. the in-itself and the for-itself). But there is a significant—one might say definitive—difference. For, in the Hegelian case, the former is converted to the latter on account of intolerance to contradiction, conveying an overall impression of earnestness to the conceptual work. In the romantic case, there is no such conversion, for irony works just to the extent that it is not translated into flat declaration. We have also seen that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* there is an experiential dimension to apparent contradiction that drives the dialectic, one that involves not just entertaining opposing conceptual structures but also rather something more on the order of *asserting* them. On this count it almost suggests itself that one main Hegelian contention is that the romantic account of dialectical rationality *cum* irony is deficient in its response to the presence and effect of contradictory assertion in a form of consciousness. Instead of reconciling the apparent contradictories in higher order and more comprehensive forms of consciousness whose existence depends on the dissolution of the appearance of contradictoriness, all Schlegel affords is an account of reconciling oneself to such contradictories. In effect, Schlegel elevates what Hegel takes to be apparent contradiction in core claims to reality, and then attempts to argue for a form of experience that can accommodate the contradiction while preserving the integrity of the form. For Hegel irony is nothing more or less than the attempt to square this circle. Romanticism, that is, can have no 'positive' dimension along which dialectic works; consequently, claims for romantic 'progression' are delusional. Such progression is really just regression under the form of progression, a dialectical version of treading water or, as Hegel sometimes puts it, an account of 'bad infinity'.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ For an excellent discussion of this concept, see A. W. Moore, *The Infinite* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 96–100.

In assessing such charges, we must remind ourselves at the outset that it is a basic mistake to construe Schlegel's conception of irony as the simple *assertion* of two opposed meanings or *claims*, one (literally, and explicitly) false and the other (figuratively, but implicitly) true. What we saw instead is that Schlegel considers irony the most philosophically lucid form of conceptual synthesis, which *constitutes* any statement as provisional. Irony is a reciprocating form of presentation of statements, in which both the more assertoric element of irony (the 'claim-aspect', if one likes) and the more withholding element of irony (the 'pretense aspect', if one likes) mutually condition one another, so that there is no pure withholding on one side opposite a pure assertion on the other. For Schlegel accordingly there is neither a stable, but implicit assertion available to 'insiders' nor any opposing stable, explicit assertion whose status as pretense is, again, only available to the insider.⁹⁹ To the contrary, irony is a critical form of circumspection about assertion *überhaupt*.¹⁰⁰

Asserting does play a key role, however, in Hegel's account of how dialectic progresses phenomenologically by means of contradiction. The drive to push core elements of a Hegelian form of consciousness or concept to contradiction requires that one make claims or attempt to treat basic concepts as stabilized independent of their total context, and indeed press such claims or concepts to their utmost extents relative to the form of consciousness or concept in question. Moreover, *Geist's* drive to overcome contradiction, to treat contradiction as a challenge to thought, requires a broadly assertoric attitude towards elements of the form of consciousness or concept in question. For only if core elements of a form of consciousness or concept are treated as contesting with one another does contradiction manifest as a deficiency in thought and not as constitutive of it. Put another way, while it is true that the terms in a dialectical contradiction for Hegel are not determinate enough when judged against the background of the entire progression of such terms given by the complete series of forms of consciousness or Concepts to stand in a classically conceived relation of logical contradiction, the striving for determination in the local context of a form of consciousness (and the *relative* determination of the terms internal to that domain) is an indispensable part of Hegel's conception of *Geist's* experience of its dialectical path. In such limited domains, there is contradiction relative to the conceptual resources that can be on call in the domain. Moreover, the contradiction cannot abide in

⁹⁹ That is, it is a mistake to think that what saves the ironist from just asserting contradictions is simply a distinction between implicit and explicit terms.

¹⁰⁰ Irony does not require—indeed it prohibits—not taking claims seriously. Rather, it modifies what it means to take them seriously: in a Kantian or Fichtean vein, it adds to any given thought the further thought that there is inherent openness to radical change in position as situations dictate.

the domain; it must produce sublation. Now, it would be uncharitable to ascribe to Hegel the view that romantic irony involves simple assertion of contradictions classically conceived, although he does at times come close to saying this.¹⁰¹ His bald statements that irony is *completely* undialectical are similarly polemical. Irony must be dialectical for Hegel if it is a conceptual formation at all; moreover, romantic irony conceives of itself expressly as dialectical and thus is a highly articulated form of dialectic, a point that Hegel grants. What he must mean by such statements, as we have already canvassed, is that irony operates with an impoverished conception of concepts and the essential character of dialectical opposition, and on this basis features a form of *dialectical* contradiction that leaves contradiction in place at local levels and, therefore, which is moribund. The romantics attempt to move beyond traditional conceptions of the conceptual role of opposition and assertion in thought but cannot do so in a philosophically satisfactory way. This inadequate conception of the nature of dialectic, in turn, manifests in one might call the 'master contradiction' asserted in romanticism according to Hegel. Just as with Hegel, the operative scope of 'contradiction' is broad. The ironist does deploy cognitive structures involving single claims or sets of delimited claims, but these are in service of a conviction that such ironizing is global and structures both whole individual points of view across a life (whole idiolects) and whole collective forms of thought (whole sociolects). The typical Hegelian contention that operates on this global level is: irony must deny claim-making a central role, but that denial is itself a claim. There is an alternative way to put the objection, one that shifts the emphasis from the synchronic to the diachronic: are the principal doctrines of the reciprocal proof, global regulativism, and irony exempt from the contingencies of historical formation or not? If the former, they would seem to have a special and unearned status (perhaps even an ironic one!) by the very lights of Schlegel's historicism. If the latter: they cannot properly ground the romantic enterprise, if that enterprise were more historically extended than the historical present. As we saw, much of Schlegel's philosophical and philological output of the 1790s and early 1800s is dedicated to the project of reinterpreting the philosophical literary past in what were for him present day, romantic terms. Is this reinterpretation to be understood as

¹⁰¹ In his review of Solger, discussed in the Excursus to this chapter, Hegel claims that romantic irony consists in asserting contradictions—that is, so to speak, at a first-order level of speech act. That is different from what I am calling below the 'master contradiction', which has to do with a claim for the conceptual role for irony—that role of *that* concept—as such. On the former sort of claim, see also Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, p. 117, perhaps the most rampant extant misinterpretation of Schlegel on irony. Berlin holds not only that Schlegel asserts contradictions knowingly (as a pyrrhonist might, according to one of the tropes), but also that he believes such contradictions to be true because they are contradictions.

immanent in the Hegel fashion, i.e. as drawing out of the past conceptual (romantic) resources that are implicitly there but only now can be fully extracted? Were the romantic principles always in such materials inchoate? Or is it a matter of present need dictating reimagining such past resources as in important ways continuous with the present and perhaps even as anticipating present concerns?

What might Schlegel's response to such charges be? What was said above concerning the role of assertion and the meaning of the term 'claim' in these rival accounts might supply a needed initial caution with regard to this self-undermining charge. If the global irony is not a 'claim' in the sense presupposed by many typical versions of such objections that may be enough to convince that the simple charge is, at least as stated, simplistic as well. That irony is global is a proposal concerning critical methodology, not the assertion of a lawlike proposition. Self-application does not raise semantic difficulty. All that it counsels is to continue to apply the critical apparatus of irony even to the practice of irony, which is what one might expect of a theory according to which critique is thoroughgoing and never-ending. Moreover, it is not at all clear that statements of global irony, even if one were to hold them to be assertions of propositions, have the required judgmental form for such undermining charges to take hold. It should be noted that Schlegel typically does not use the universal quantifier when he speaks of the scope of irony. He only infrequently says that *all* is irony or that irony applies or must apply to *all* knowledge claims, beliefs, moral evaluations, etc. Instead, in the instances where he makes large-scope claims for irony, which are almost always closely connected with the idea of ongoing critique (i.e. the critique of critique, etc.), he deploys statement unadorned by quantifiers, forms like 'art is ironic'. Following Aristotle and Anscombe's lead one might well view such statements as evaluative, having the force of 'for the most part' or 'when functioning well'.¹⁰² 'Swans are regal' asserts neither that all swans are regal nor that some swans are so; rather, what is meant is that swans are *on average* regal, or even that they *ought* to be so regarded. Understanding the usual large-scope contentions of Schlegel on the matter of irony in this light fits well with the interpretative gloss we offered of the reciprocal proof as well as with the overriding emphasis the romantics as a whole give to regulative reason. What is at issue in irony is a way of working through meanings under conditions of continuous semantic critique. Statements about the ambit of this work are not in the end best understood as universal in nature. The point of ironizing items in one's point of view on things is to forestall arbitrary cessation of thinking. One might very well hold that a precept like global irony, when

¹⁰² G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 33 [1958]: 1–16.

understood as stating not unflinching *that* it applies come what may but rather as an instantiation of the critical impulse, is not the sort of thing to which the Hegelian objection could attach. It is quite simply, as we said before, not a 'claim' in the relevant sense; to think of it as being a claim in that sense is to force on the ironist an abstracting and faintly juridical idea of the precept as a rule. On the interpretation on offer, it would neither offend Schlegel nor canons of argumentative validity to allow that global statements of irony themselves be subject to irony. Indeed, it is what one would expect. A response to the objection involving the self-application of strong claims for historicity would proceed along similar lines. That romanticism is a historically bound philosophical approach that treats theoretical activity as generally so bound in not self-undermining. In order to be so, the idea of precept on offer would have to be one that romanticism would reject, i.e. a fixed claim. To allow otherwise is just to swallow the Platonist's bait and allow the substitution of its conception of critical distance (distance achieved by complete abstraction from context) for the conception of critical distance native to romanticism (distance achieved by context-guided irony). There is no reason for the romantic to sell irony so cheaply.

Let's turn to the issue of self-determination as a form of freedom. Overcoming contradiction dialectically is for Hegel the process of *Geist's* self-conscious emergence as self-determining—a social-agent extension of the Kantian idea that it is through the subjective construction of objects that agents exercise their capacities to reflect on themselves and, in that such reflection, make themselves the selves they are. For Hegel it makes sense to consider dialectic a means of self-determination—of the determination of the self by the self—because even though, as we have seen, full stability of determination would only accrue upon dialectical completion, *Geist* progresses in its self-knowledge in terms of its successes and failures in fixing and stabilizing its self-conception and so transforming itself. That is its project. While it may be true that these attempts remain incomplete until the full series of them is run through, that should not obscure that self-determination is omnipresent in the series as its motor.

The contrast with Schlegel is stark. Schlegel wants to drive home the points that there never is a determinate self and that the project of seeking stability of self via self-determination is futile. Hegel's teleology and account of systematic closure makes final determination relative to complete system possible and makes thinking of stepwise, incremental approximation to that end in terms of determination tenable. Because Schlegel's account of how the movement of thought can possibly relate to the absolute rules out that teleological thought, determination plays no fundamental role in his account. Irony has as one of its main goals the experience of a non-disruptive but still delicate balance between

the relative stability of a point of view, on the one hand, and its indeterminacy relative to other possibilities that may or may not dislodge the balance, on the other. It is worth remembering that this is not merely a claim about subjective capacities of thought apart from the constitution of objects of that thought; rather, in the Kantian vein it is a claim about the structure of objects as well. The motion of thought in Schlegel ultimately has nothing to do with overcoming contradiction; rather, it has to do with achieving multiple points of balance between thinking of something as actual and thinking of it as qualified by what is possible. The manner in which possibility features in Schlegel's thought is key. Possibilities do not resolve entirely into what is actual—that much is also true in Hegel's account of dialectic. And like Hegel's account possibility leads thought on, amplifies its movement. But unlike Hegel's account, possibilities in Schlegel cannot be exhausted in a univocal way, one that constrains one to actualize one possibility over others (i.e. the possibility that is the next, better and more comprehensive way of thinking). What moves one from one form of consciousness to another for Schlegel is not a perceived deficit in thought but the sheer, non-differential *conatus* of thought to think otherwise. And the paternity of the view in Fichte, which Hegel (and we) have stressed, should be kept in view, regardless of Schlegel's criticisms of Fichte's foundationalist streak: subjects become more subjective to the extent that they delve deeper into their imaginative lives in a fashion similar to Fichte's ethics of conviction. For Fichte this inner drive is directed towards a single vanishing point of pure intent that can never be reached, but of which coherence of feeling can give an indirect experience. For Schlegel the drive inwards has irony and like structures as their motor, and the effect is one of increased density of perspectives on the ways the world might be understood. Such a process is, if one likes, an analogue to the infinite divisibility of time or space in Zeno's paradoxes. Schlegel operates on the assumption that imaginative 'space'—the possibility of imagining something differently or imagining a different something—is never replete; one can always have a new take on a matter that displays its own cohesive power. One might gloss Schlegel as holding that no set of descriptions can count as one's identity, and that is not incorrect. But this is really an expedient and inexact way of putting the point. The more correct rendition is that Schlegel is willing to surrender the very concept of identity. There is no determinate self for Schlegel; all the self might be is a constant process of ironic becoming in the form of the making and unmaking of points of view.

Hegel's critique of Schlegel on this count seems to rest then precisely on interlocked charges that Schlegel (1) intends an account of self-determination that, in turn, operates with incoherent treatments of (2) assertion and (3) contradiction.

The question arises again whether, in essence, Hegel has imported into his accounting of the deficits of romantic irony terms that the romantics specifically modify or rule out. Hegel wishes to demonstrate that irony is (part of) a form of consciousness that is inferior to others and to Absolute Knowing—that is the claimed dialectical result of the Beautiful Soul/Evil discussion in the *Phenomenology*. But the point is also to establish Hegelian dialectic as superior to, from Hegel's point of view, ironic dialectic. A *dialectical* demonstration of such superiority would have to involve immanent critique of the allegedly inferior form of consciousness. The question of whether Hegel's critique in this regard is delivered in the course of phenomenological development is very much a live one. In other words: has Hegel shown in a Hegelian way that romantic conceptions of irony must give way to more properly Hegelian ones, or is his account *malgré lui* un-Hegelian?

There are a number of other key differences between Schlegel and Hegel that can be modeled in this way. For instance, the question of whether romantic dialectic is entirely negative, i.e. cannot be truly progressive. We have seen that Schlegel contends that irony (and allied cognitive regimens) have a progressive nature. But that progress is what we have called *intensive*, progression in terms of making more replete imaginative interpretative possibilities. This need not result in the sort of progression that Hegel views essential to dialectic, which is in comparison *extensive*, i.e. it involves sequential progressive change from one worldview to another, measured in terms of coherency that overcomes conceptual tension. For Hegel, as we have seen, *Geist* or Logic progresses in a necessary and *univocal* way toward a final form of understanding of the possible ways to understand the world and humanity's place in it, which possible ways can be ordered in terms of relations of inferiority and superiority. For Schlegel, by contrast, the individual human being progresses *equivocally* by advancing ironically various self-understandings and, so, 'approximates' (*annähert*) the absolute. One must be careful with the concept of approximation here. Such approximation strictly speaking cannot be asymptotic—the gradual nearing to a limit never reached—for even that sort of approximating is too convergent and affirmative for the romantics.¹⁰³ Rather, ironic subjects approach the absolute by being better able to understand its ultimate elusiveness via their practical

¹⁰³ This is Benjamin's primary charge against the Jena romantics, i.e. that they hold that taking on different forms of consciousness sequentially exhausts a fund of total available possibilities, thereby bringing thought closer to the absolute. See *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, I: 7–122 *passim*. In his *Trauerspiel* book Benjamin contrasts what he takes to be this overly optimistic romantic picture with the 'allegorical' procedure operative in German Baroque literature, which is less sanguine about the adequacy of human imaginary structures to give a sense of the absolute.

engagement. That is, 'approximation' is not coming nearer to the absolute by finite means; it is to use finite means in order to compound experience of the absolute's utter transcendence. For Schlegel, then, conceptual tension is productive in its own right; it is there to be exploited—not there to overcome—there in order to amplify ambiguity. Schlegel's basic claim is that it is always possible to make new moves within imaginative space in this way and that doing so simultaneously brings one closer to the absolute by experiencing its ability to support many ways to take the world to be meaningful and expresses ultimate distance from the absolute by reflection on the inexhaustibility of it for such imaginative handling. Need this conception of progress give way, dialectically speaking, to Hegel's? Does romantic intensive progression dialectically 'entail' extensive progression? It would seem not. On the assumption that conceptual space is, as it were, infinitely divisible, there would neither be repetition nor cognition of experiential frustration born out of repetition. So long as novel and sustaining, yet perhaps subtle, differences could be produced that did not collapse the constitutive tension in irony, it would seem that there would be possible coherence. Of course, it would not be coherence of the sort Hegel intends, i.e. coherence as *a* form of convergence on a shared or potentially sharable focal point, but that should not be counted against romantic irony. So, it does not seem as a formal matter that ironic dialectic would suffer the sort of breakdown Hegel thinks characteristic of progressive dialectic unless the assumption of infinite divisibility is in error. Recall that the assumption follows from the conception of the absolute that drives both Schlegel's and Novalis's thought, and the question arose in chapter one as to how defeasible itself the assumption is. The position we took there was expressly reconstructive: that appearances to the side, a view consistent with the emphasis shown in Schlegel on historicity dictates no more than a claim that such divisibility has not run out *yet*, a purported fact that comports with the idea that the absolute supports an infinite number of interpretations that do not, even in Hegel's expanded terms, 'contradict' one another. Progress, in Schlegel's terms, consists in bringing more and more of the conceptual background required for the meaning of claims into ironic purview; it is the growth of *the ironic ambit*. Will such progress yield another form of consciousness that is better than its predecessor? That depends on what one means by 'better'. If by 'better' one means 'more determinate' or 'more systematically integrated,' the answer is: no. If, however, by 'better' one means 'a more comprehensive view of the possible objects of irony' then the answer is: yes.

Yet another arena for Hegel's dialectical conflation of his views and those of the romantics is their competing views on the nature and function of concepts. In the traditional case, one analyzes the concept, breaking it down into its

constituents with the goal of resolving its content in terms of those constituents. When this is accomplished one can then assess the simple constituents and recompose the concept through synthesis of these. Analogically speaking, this traditional account of conceptual criticism begins with a domain of meaning and concentrates its forces on further centralizing the basis for meaning in a set of core constituents. Hegelian dialectic of course is not straightforwardly analytic—for instance, for Hegel there is ultimately no bright-line distinction between concepts and conceptual relations—but it shares this goal of conceptual concentration. For, as we have seen, Hegel holds that forms of consciousness have an inherent critical drive by means of which they decompose themselves into their grounding elements. In any form one inevitably discovers some incompatibility among these elements that cannot be accommodated without altering one or more of them. In this process the opposition of elements is resolved in favor of synthesis of those elements at a superior level of comprehension. This increases the ambit of knowledge by progressively eliminating inessential differentiation. Full assimilation of difference is the only avenue to higher specification of thought for Hegel. That the conditions for this specification are holistic and thus driven by contextualization of terms in theories of greater and greater scope should not distract one from the main point that we have also already emphasized: that Hegel's theory gives pride of place to determination in knowledge and self-understanding. So, while it is true that Hegel preserves ample place for indeterminacy in his account of thought as inherently moving, in the sense of the not-as-yet-determined, the closed form of Hegelian phenomenology and logic is geared to making up this 'deficiency'. Irony, on the other hand, is a conceptual regimen scaled to *avoid* determination, whether of objects or the self. True, it is a discipline of avoidance that uses determinative cognitive structures in unique ways to partly undermine themselves, but determination is not the goal of the process. This avoidance is key to the ironic treatment of concepts or forms of consciousness, which aims at conceptual *extremes* in order to keep as much differentiation in play within a concept as is consistent with remaining within imaginative reach of it. Romantic irony involves tension between present commitment to a concept and openness to other ways of thinking. Schlegel accepts the Socratic idea that irony is non-directive and that an ironic posture with regard to a claim, concept, or form of life, leaves much open for interpretation, not only on the part of the audience but also on the part of the speaker.¹⁰⁴ Irony then takes as one of its main tasks to initialize imagination more freely than does Hegelian determinate negation. The ironic process, unlike one leading from one

¹⁰⁴ See *Ap.* 40A.

concept to another by necessity, does not prescribe how far afield the imagination can go in its response. On this regimen the contours of a concept are established by interpreting it and its conceptual connections to an ever-receding furthest point, not by collapsing difference in favor of focal meaning.¹⁰⁵ In its fashion, Hegelian dialectic also works by expanding cognitively available conceptual connection, but one might say that the expansion, unlike romantic irony, ends in extremes past which one may not press without courting contradiction.¹⁰⁶ The crucial difference between Schlegel and Hegel then has to do with the nature of that extreme—its ontology or function.¹⁰⁷ For Hegel one reaches the extremes of a particular concept or formation of concepts by a laborious attempt to preserve a determinate orientation in the face of the advancing recalcitrance of the world. That is, at the heart of Hegelian dialectic there resides a principle of conservation of conceptual resources; that is what makes the dialectical path one of ‘despair’ for him. Forms of consciousness strongly tend towards self-maintenance within their bounds; their impulse to retrenchment is a prominent aspect of their dialectical function that, combined with the impulse not to tolerate contradiction once it emerges, cannot be overridden in the form of consciousness in question. The defining extreme of a conceptual array does not have this function in Schlegel’s approach, which recognizes no such principle of conservation. The experience of not being able to surpass a conceptual extreme is certainly real according to Schlegel, but it results simply from a contingent limitation of one’s imagination. It is compatible with this understanding of irony as a form of dialectic that there be progression between forms of life on the basis of *felt* contradiction, but, unlike in Hegel, there is no necessity to such progression. One might say, then, that romantic irony is a way to expose one to a surrogate for contradiction that does not resolve itself into a settled form of life.

D. Sociality, religion, and politics

It is important to see in Schlegel’s view on concepts and conceptual movement a concern for how dialectical processes constitute forms of social understanding. The differences we have canvassed in the rival approaches to formal questions involving the nature of dialectical reason can be combined with the phenomenological

¹⁰⁵ This is the romantic provenance for Benjamin’s and Adorno’s idea of a constellation. See Fred Rush, ‘Jena Romanticism and Benjamin’s Critical Epistemology’, in *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. B. Hanssen and A. Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 123–36.

¹⁰⁶ The *locus classicus* of this sort of understanding of the epistemic consequences of Hegelian dialectic is Dieter Henrich, ‘Hegels Theorie über den Zufall’, in *Hegel im Kontext*, 4th ed. (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 157–86.

¹⁰⁷ This question of how to understand the function of limits and limitation is also important for Kierkegaard’s conception of *confinia*. See chapter three.

presentation of the structure of the Beautiful Soul and Evil to come to a more concrete understanding of a primary issue that divides Schlegel and Hegel having to do with the foundations of social theory.

The sections of the *Phenomenology* that deal with romantic irony are of course not close to being the final sections of the book; Hegel reboots the dialectical apparatus to deal with issues at the intersection of social philosophy and religion. This marks a crucial departure from romanticism for him, one that is formative as well for the social and political philosophy of the Young Hegelians and Marx. From Hegel's perspective the romantic theory of subjectivity remains in important respects pre-social. The Religion sections of the *Phenomenology* are Hegel's official report on where romanticism leaves off and Hegelian philosophy begins. For Hegel, religious thought represents *Geist's* communal nature as irreducible to individual subjectivity; this is the point of departure from romanticism. The dialectical development of conceptions of such irreducible community proceeds in the standard Hegelian fashion. *Geist* attempts to understand itself as irreducibly communal by constructing understandings of *other things* in such terms. The advanced religious forms of consciousness that Hegel assigns to 'Revealed Religion'—primarily Christianity and, within Christianity, Protestantism—gradually recognize that social human bonds at first attributed to God in reality follow from *Geist's* own nature. There are three indices for development of this idea within Religion: (1) an increase in the anthropomorphization of God, i.e. in treating the absolute under the category of subject; (2) the transcendence of any absolute division between the profane and the sacred; and (3) an increase in universality, i.e. so that God is no longer tribal, but rather the God of all.

Perhaps the most revealing component from a Hegelian perspective is the anthropomorphizing. Hegel treats anthropomorphism as socially progressive; the more what is supernatural is modeled in human terms, the more the social dimension of religious thought takes human agency to be its basis. This provides the template to Hegel's treatment of the various forms of consciousness in these sections of the *Phenomenology*, which are some of the most straightforwardly historical of the book. He begins with forms of religious thought from which even the idea of an individuated being is absent, moving from there to animalistic forms of religion, to hybrid animal/anthropic forms (Dynastic Egyptian), to pluralistic anthropic (Greece/Rome), to monistic anthropic religions in which a god is a single superhuman (Christianity).¹⁰⁸ Christianity—and Protestantism,

¹⁰⁸ Hegel identifies the art of ancient Egypt with the form of consciousness 'Der Werkmeister' (HW 3: 508–10). It is the last stage of a triad of forms of consciousness that Hegel calls 'Natural Religion'. Natural Religion sees God as inhabiting events or things that are not self-conscious: light,

especially—is the most developed form of Religion because in it the community realizes that what is divine (i.e. the Holy Ghost) is uniquely instantiated by the community in its self-conscious group practices (i.e. rites and rituals). The development as a whole purports to establish that human sociality is not a coordination exercise between beings that are primarily individual and pre-social. Being an individual and being social are coeval.

Dialectically early forms of Religion maintain a strict separation between the sacred and profane, such that representation of the sacred in profane terms is either forbidden (iconoclasm) or very problematic. Since representation (*Vorstellung*) is the native mode of religious expression, this also means that rigorously iconoclastic forms of religion are almost not ‘really’ religion at all. Art-Religion then provides room for divinity to guide the hand of the adept in making singular ritualistic objects that act as foci for group reflection. In Art-Religion this reflection has very little critical distance and is tied strongly to mythic re-experience.¹⁰⁹ Revealed Religion finally collapses the sacred-profane divide as much as is possible for representation, and culminates in the ideas that God walks among humans as a human (the Incarnation)¹¹⁰ and, perhaps more importantly for Hegel, that God is dispersed in nothing more than the community of believers (the Pentecost).¹¹¹ Such a community is not just a collection of individuals who are, separately, ‘in faith’; according to Revealed Religion, the basically individual character of such ‘faithful’ subjects is a block to reconciliatory human self-understanding. Faith and Religion are thus two distinct forms of thinking about the relation of community and individual. Finally, as Religion progresses, the conceived *scope* for divine presence enlarges. Initial forms of Religion are tribal and think of gods as limited to special and intrinsic relations of select, small groups. The social function of the idea of such gods is to

trees, animals, etc. Hegel is very clear in this regard, even going so far as to hold that the three forms of Natural Religion should be correlated to the three forms of consciousness discussed in the opening sections on ‘Consciousness’ (HW 3: 507). (In fact, Hegel holds that the Art-Religion sections track Self-Consciousness, and that Revealed Religion is an extrapolation of the dialectical resources of Spirit.) Because Hegel tends to identify Religion with viewing communal self-conscious entities as divine, Natural Religion is not truly Religion for him. It is difficult to translate the German ‘Werkmeister’ into English without a loss of meaning: the standard ‘artificer’ is too Latinate and denotes a level of human agency in the creation of the object of religious veneration that outstrips Natural Religion. On the other hand, ‘foreman’ or ‘foreperson’ is too modern. The idea that Hegel is after is that the hand of the maker of the object (e.g. the Great Pyramid at Giza) does not appear on the object—the maker is more or less anonymous (i.e. not really an architect, in the modern sense). This is important because Hegel considers it to be essential for ‘Art-Religion’, the next set of forms of consciousness, to convey a sense of community beyond the individual by means of artistic authorship and authority.

¹⁰⁹ See HW 13: 409.

¹¹⁰ See HW 3: 552–5.

¹¹¹ See HW 3: 555–7.

differentiate the tribe from those outside it through claims that the god of one's tribe is superior in power to other gods. The scope of the relevant community in Revealed Religion, by contrast, is universal; all of humanity is included.

As we have seen, Hegel does not consider Religion to be the final word on *Geist's* self-understanding. Religion is still stymied by the representational form of this understanding, which requires that the group social component be viewed as an object outside of, or at least distinct from, humanity. Christianity conceives of the unity of the divine and the human in terms of a narrative of a past, unique occurrence: God and humanity are one *in Jesus*. But this is inadequate from Hegel's perspective. The truth is that the divine and the human are one in a fully developed *community*, and thus in each and every member of such a community. Religion in its terminal phases, however, is still caught in contradiction: on the one hand, it *is* God; on the other hand, it must conceive of itself as *not* God.¹¹² Absolute Knowing can recognize the truth of both sides, but only by departing from representation as the mode of self-presentation of this truth. Hegelian logic picks up from this point, with its non-representational conception of thought.

Given this picture of how religion operates at the advance guard of social self-consciousness, romantic *symphilosophieren* is progressive in Hegel's estimation, but ultimately fails on all three fronts set out above. The defining deficit of romanticism is the inadequacy of its subjectivity-centered theory of the subject-society relation as a view of human sociality. The deficit is twofold. First, Hegel holds that a failure to give a viable account of human social relations is at the same time a failure to give an adequate account of human self-knowledge and knowledge more generally. Second, the particular form that the inadequacy of romantic social philosophy takes precludes any plausible political theory, here considered a species of social theory. To the Hegelian, all that the romantic theory tokens politically is cultism, with adepts *cum* romantic philosophers at its center—an inherently conservative view of social relations, which reposes in an elite an esoteric view of society. Romanticism will always strain to give an account of how the ironic hub of the elect can instill a socially workable conception of life in the non-elect except by means of sheer charisma. This is a serious charge, and the dialectical transition from 'Spirit' to 'Religion' pivots on precisely this claimed failure of romanticism to provide even a minimal account of social relation.¹¹³

¹¹² Cf. Kierkegaard on the 'Absolute Paradox', chapter three.

¹¹³ The best account of the historical background for the formation of Hegel's political views is still Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Now, it is clear that the Jena romantics do not intend to turn their collective backs on social and political matters; in fact, they aspire to social and, more narrowly, political impacts for their theories. Novalis and Schlegel wrote significantly about the nature of the political state and of the connection between historical political precedents and contemporary affairs.¹¹⁴ Perhaps the best-known works are Novalis's *Glauben und Liebe* (1797/8) and *Christenheit oder Europa* (1799),¹¹⁵ but Schlegel's earlier 'Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus' (1796) is in many ways a highpoint of early German romantic political leftism.¹¹⁶ Schlegel's essay is a close study of Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795). Although Schlegel does, like Novalis, at times deploy what he takes to be the dialectical structure of love as a replacement for more 'mechanical' ways of conceiving of human community (see, e.g., *Lucinde*), the essay does not rely on this model overtly. It is more consonant with Schlegel's development in the fragments of 1797–8 of the concept of irony and the doctrine of the *Wechselerweis*. Attention to this overlap opens a better point of contrast with Hegel on the question of political engagement. (But it should be remembered that, under the influence of Hölderlin, the early Hegel was drawn to the concepts of love and life as a model for dialectic and political constitution as well.)¹¹⁷

The dominant romantic model of social relations, as we have seen, emphasizes contingent imaginative overlap of first-person points of view, where those points of view include not only continuous openness to their own defeasibility, but also an incipient tension between commitment to and distance from them. Such

¹¹⁴ For a trenchant analysis of the development and depletion of romantic political theory, see Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), esp. chap. III. Particularly striking is her claim that Hegel's is 'the most romantic philosophical attack on romanticism' (p. 47).

¹¹⁵ NS 3: 507–24. There is extensive scholarship on Novalis' *Christenheit* essay, with opinion on its content ranging from that content being extraordinarily conservative and historically retrogressive to symbolic and utopian-progressive. The most judicious assessment, with an overview of the literature is, Pauline Kleingeld, 'Romantic Cosmopolitanism: Novalis' "Christianity or Europe"', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 [2008]: 269–84. Kleingeld makes a strong case for a progressive strain in the essay, even when considered against the background of *Glauben und Liebe*'s paean to the loving Father-King. Schlegel found Novalis' turn to Catholicism and dismissal of Protestantism in the essay odd, but not troubling. He seemed to have viewed it as insouciant, especially since Novalis was in part styling the essay as a *Rede* in Schleiermacher's sense of the term. One might think this rich, given Schlegel's later embrace of 'Mother Church', but it expresses, at this point in the development of Schlegel's thought, a real difference in approach.

¹¹⁶ KFSA 7: 11–25.

¹¹⁷ See the so-called *Liebesfragment* at HW 1: 244–50. Hegel wrote the text in late 1797, a good year prior to the more extended and famous treatment of love in his analysis of the philosophical import of the Sermon on the Mount in *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal*. For the latter discussion, see HW 1: 324–36; see also HW 1: 394–7. It is telling that Hegel contrasts sharply Kantian moral law and the 'law of love', the latter of which is more dialectical to his eye.

points of view are not in any way sealed off from the impact of others, but this impact will be more like that of coming to see that one's interpretation of a poem or a painting can be broadened or contracted than like that of disproof.¹¹⁸ We also emphasized the pragmatic and experimental aspects of the view, along with its laudable unwillingness to dictate terms ahead of time for an emerging conception of social being. This was the felt situation of many intellectuals after the collapse of modern metaphysics and epistemology in Kant, the advent of the French Revolution, and the advancing, unwelcome idea that the form of understanding present in modern science was sufficient for all purposes. Moreover, such pragmatic overlap need not converge on consensus, at least not on the sort of consensus that has a basis in simple agreement. This also distinguishes the romantic approach to questions of the fundamental structure of sociality from Hegel's. It is a fundamental Hegelian precept that, the more one comprehends another, the more one is reconciled with another. Increased comprehension must in time breed mutuality of belief, even if the path to that end involves at times a heightened sense of difference. According to Hegel, the better I know you, or the more we will share understanding, the more that shared understanding will involve convergence of our points of view. This rules out what one might think is the more realistic and salient case where, the more I know about you, even adjusting for prejudices on my part, the more I understand better the reasons that you are quite unlike me. For some it might seem something on the order of a truism that I will like you the more you turn out to be similar to me, but that does not follow from allowing for the clear understanding of differences.¹¹⁹ It seems a live possibility, to take an apparently perennial case, that Israelis and Palestinians understand each other *very well indeed* and that such excellent mutual understanding is what underpins their mutual animosity. That need not mean, of course, that one should not seek better understanding of others, seek such under the head of seeing things through their eyes, and even make it something on the order of a standing desideratum of social engagement. But it does mean that the rationale for this need not be an expectation of mutual *agreement*. It is just here that irony is most cautionary. There is a tendency in the face of a failed expectation of convergence to smuggle one's own self-conception into one's conception of another, to reinterpret in one's own lights elements of another that in fact are divergent and recalcitrant to mutuality, which can result in a kind

¹¹⁸ Later in this chapter, we treat Hegel's critique of romantic aesthetics and, with it, what he considered overly aesthetic political theories.

¹¹⁹ Not for all. If I dislike various aspects of myself, or perhaps on that basis dislike myself altogether, the extent to which you become more like me in those aspects the more I will dislike you or those things in you.

of forced assimilation of another in one's own terms. Schlegel might indeed consider this a standing threat to views like Hegel's that place such dialectical importance on necessary convergence of viewpoints.

Let's turn to more specific elements of Schlegel's political theory. Schlegel's politics during his Jena years is uniformly republican and politically progressive, going well beyond Kant in its rejection of the 'enlightened monarch' as a permissible form of democracy and in its advocacy of a right to rebellion.¹²⁰ While Schlegel does write that as a general matter enlightened monarchy and democracy can be compatible, he is clear that democracy in its most potent forms not only does not require a monarch, but might dispense with one.¹²¹ Monarchy has an inherent tendency both to replace the will of the people with that of the sovereign, obstructing political representation, and to overly centralize government without leaving adequate room for the social formation of citizens by any social entity short of the full state. The former contention is familiar. Although Schlegel is here closer to Rousseau than is Kant himself, and indeed at the avant-garde of political radicalism of the time, his call for the expansion of the political will is the less important point for present purposes. The latter claim has a threefold import. First, Schlegel's insistence on the need for diversified intermediate social groups has important consequences for his social and political philosophy that puts him in common cause with Hegel. Second, this attention to more local institutional frameworks provides a lens through which to view the importance of historically past social and political forms of life—ancient and especially medieval—for early German romanticism. Third, the idea that such groups are necessary for political well-being is an important clue to the place of religion in Schlegel's political views.

Schlegel stresses, as does Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*, the political necessity of intermediary groups and institutional frameworks for the formation of political subjects.¹²² More than that, Schlegel agrees with Hegel that subjectivity as such requires such groups—that is what intersubjective interpretative practice for the romantics is supposed to form and involve. However much one may take the impression that Hegel's claim against romanticism amounts to a sweeping

¹²⁰ See KFSA 7: 13–14, 20–1, 24–5. For Kant on rebellion, see especially AA 8: 299–300, 382–3; for Kant on enlightened monarchs, see AA 8: 352–3 and n.

¹²¹ KFSA 7: 24–5.

¹²² Hegel's analysis revolves around his doctrine of the estates (*Stände*) and, in the case of urban workers, the corporation (*Korporation*). See HW 7: 358–60, 393–8. It is important in the latter case not to read back into Hegel's terminology too modern a sense. Corporations are for him *Verbindungen*, the primary examples of which are guilds, etc. They allow their members to achieve a sense of identity that transcends individual and familial ties. Modern corporations would fail in precisely this regard—indeed, one might argue, are constructed in order to do so.

declaration that it posits self-interested, antisocial subjectivity as the basic human condition, this cannot be Hegel's contention. So much is already apparent from the treatment of the Conscience. Much of the struggle within that form of consciousness according to Hegel's presentation is precisely to instill a palpable sense of social belonging. Hegel's critique, rather, is that Conscience does not have a *viable* account of social relations, not that it takes having such an account to be in any sense optional.

As was Hegel, Schlegel, and other early German romantics were concerned about what they perceived to be the social costs of emerging free-trade capitalism and incipient industrialization. Of course German-speaking lands were less well developed in both respects than France, the Netherlands and, especially, England. But in a way this 'backwardness' provided a distance that engendered a more potentially radical critique of the dangers. If monarchism was at fault for overly centralized government and a narrow distribution of political freedom, it was liberalism in its British vein that was responsible for a breakdown of the idea that intermediary political structures are constitutive of a well-functioning democracy. Romanticism looked back to medieval models (e.g. guilds, *Mensurvereine*) as ways to reconceive in present terms how individual identity might be formed through membership in groups in ways that better preserve one's sense of the uniqueness of one's work than does free-market trade and provides a more sustaining social framework for integrating work with other pursuits.¹²³ Hegel also looked to such models, although he tends to see their invocation by the romantics as atavistic.¹²⁴ This is no doubt due to Hegel's tendency to view early romanticism in the light of Schlegel's later, conservative turn to both Roman Catholicism and Metternich. But, in his earlier work at least, one might speculate that Schlegel's mild response to Novalis' attraction to the Church is due to what Schlegel (perhaps myopically) saw to be its pluralistic, 'carnival'¹²⁵ character, much in keeping with his understanding of the romantic nature of medieval literary sources. Ancient and medieval models were reminders of what had been lost in modern life—a more immediate sense of belonging and a form of rationality that is more devotional than instrumental. Early Schlegel does not intend his readers to yearn for an unqualified reintroduction of these models. He

¹²³ See *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, NS 3: 509–10; *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* 1106, NS 3: 470–1.

¹²⁴ Implicit in the lexis of the German *Stand* is the idea of fixity. Estates are constitutive social modes that permit agents to achieve relatively stable social identities. As always, Hegel is against what he considers to be eccentric forms of personal experimentation, even if (or perhaps especially if) such experimentation involves intermediary group devices.

¹²⁵ In the sense treated in Mikhail Bakhtin's work. See *Rabelais and his World*, tr. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), esp. chs. 3 and 4; and *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and tr. C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 129–37.

recognizes that there is no way to turn the clock back on the greater capacity of modern subjects to reflect—for him, as for Kant and Hegel, to think *about* oneself is to think *for* oneself. Instead, his project is to experiment in modern ways against the grain of some dominant modern tendencies in the hope of transforming them. That said, it is true that in their attempts to provide such political idealizations Schlegel and Novalis can seem to advocate small-scale social relations at the expense of the large-scale state. It is not for nothing that anarchists like Bakunin could think of themselves as extended romantics; but, it is telling that they could also claim a provenance in Hegel.

In the face of the breakdown of monarchical authority and the threat that modern-scientific forms of rationality would crowd out all else, the romantics advocate reconceiving the relation of religion to authority. Here Schleiermacher often takes the lead, but both Novalis and Schlegel join in the call for a ‘new religion’. They do not mean for this form of religion to be merely compatible with politically progressive thinking; rather, they intend that religion should serve as a mainspring for such thought. Often scholars have concentrated on how this new conception of religion attempts to force together its Rousseauian and Spinozist tendencies in a form of pantheism.¹²⁶ Another tack is to foreground, especially with Schleiermacher, the connection of this new conception with contemporaneous developments in biblical hermeneutics. These are certainly rich veins that can be mined to good advantage when contrasting romanticism’s views on religion and its forms of sociality with Hegel’s views of the same. But there is a third approach, complementary with the first two, that one might think even better establishes the contrast: the connection of religion to artistic innovation. As we saw in chapter one, Schlegel and Novalis argue that subjectivity and community are reciprocally constitutive, and that the modality of this constitution is interpretation. But, further, it is ‘interpretation’ understood in a particular way, that is, against the background of the relation of reflective finite beings to the absolute. Schlegel attempts to be as spare as possible in his treatment of the absolute; there is no descriptive or prescriptive category that is directly predicable of it. He hesitates even to apply the term ‘infinite’ to it, since that would imply that a contrast with ‘finite’ is internal to the absolute. All such predication must involve strict regimens of circumlocution: the *ordo inversus*, irony, etc. Even then, predication is not the main activity; it is subordinated to a display of predication’s inadequacy and the meaning of that inadequacy for humans’ reflective purchase on cognitive and practical agency. Interpretation is the basic epistemological

¹²⁶ Frederick Beiser takes something like this approach in his excellent *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

category coordinate with this ontological picture. What one calls 'knowledge' in almost any of its standard senses is nothing more than a species of interpretation that has fixed itself subject to contingent, local, pragmatic canons of belief. As we saw, Schlegel is especially keen on thinking that both the impetus towards and practice of interpretation in this sense are guided by capacities that one associates with being artistic. Two aspects of this view are worth further remark. The first has to do with the social ontology of the group entities that are the aim and result of the interpretative process. It is something of a bromide to say that romantic social theory conceives of societies as *organic*.¹²⁷ This might mean many things. For instance, calling a group social entity 'organic' might mean that, like an organism, the entity in question seeks to maintain a state of relative internal equilibrium, dependent on the external forces operating on it, or that it has an inherent tendency to attempt to replicate across generations. But the analogy can also suggest something more formal, having to do with the part-whole relations internal to the entity. Here the idea is that, like an organism, the whole social entity is not just an aggregate of its parts. Rather, its constituents have their nature as constituents in virtue of their membership in the whole. Reciprocally, the whole is the whole that it is by having such parts-of-the-whole. That is, the unity of the whole in an organism, and by analogy group social entities, is purposive.

The romantics certainly held that group social entities are organic in this fashion, but they extend the analogy further still, and in particular to art. The idea that art is organically structured is in actuality an extension of a view in European aesthetics from the Renaissance onwards—a view that unites empiricist and rationalist philosophies of art—that a beautiful artwork (or object of nature) is structured in such a way that there is as much complexity and variation of its elements as is consistent with overall unity and harmony. Harmonic unity of the work overall is the greater to the extent that variation and complexity is present as *pre-harmonized*, and it is present as *pre-harmonized* to the extent that the complexity functions to unite the work. The romantic equivalent of this idea of a static aesthetic relation between two cognitively grasped aspects of a work adapts it to the more dynamic relation between the making of a work and the cognition of it than is present in, say, Gottsched; perhaps the most systematic account of this new 'vitalized' classical 'diversity-in-unity' model is to be found in Schelling's 1802–3/04–5 lectures in aesthetics. Romantics like Schlegel and Novalis do

¹²⁷ For an insightful discussion of the senses in which one might understand Hegel's claim that society is organic, see Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 121–33.

not merely argue that there is a structural isomorphism between society and art; rather, art and society stem from the same interpretative, imaginative capacity and take the same aim, human self-understanding through the construction of entities that act as foci for interpretative activity. This may sound trivializing or even dangerous; even if the idea that life is a form of art is not objectionable, the notion that political life be modeled on making art or, by extension, on subjective self-fashioning, is alarming to many. Or, if one views the political function of art merely as a reflection on the surface of political reality or a vague foretaste of what might come, then one will see proposals that it might be politically formative as wildly overreaching. If, on the other hand, one views art as continuous with other social interpretative practices, subject to ongoing checks from others, then the idea may seem less irresponsible. But art is not generally subject to such checks for Schlegel and Novalis, who hold that art is the form par excellence of social self-interpretation, and this raises the question of the viability of interactive interpretation as a grounding principle of political life. This is clearly one of Hegel's main concerns. Hegel came to believe that he could draw an unbroken line from Schlegel's early work to his later conservative political activity; he accordingly chooses to pursue his advantage over romanticism via a treatment of just this triadic relation of politics, art, and religion. One might say that the real dispute is between two conceptions of the nature and use of religious thought, with which one might model social rationality. Hegel's claim, seen in this light, is that romanticism is a more reflective and modern cousin of Unhappy Consciousness, the form of consciousness with which Hegel ends the sections on 'Self-Consciousness' in the *Phenomenology*. Because romantic subjective individuality exhausts the conceptual space of the 'here and now', romantic social theory can only posit in a 'beyond' what would transcend aggregate individual willing as a basis for sociality.¹²⁸

There is likely no satisfactory response to Hegel's critique if the question is limited to whether romantic irony can make sufficient provision for modern

¹²⁸ I cannot fully treat here the relation of Hegel's critique of romanticism and Unhappy Consciousness. Minimally, such a discussion would focus on the extent to which the non-ironic Beautiful Soul corresponds to the function Hegel assigns to 'devotion' (*Andacht*) (HW 3: 168), how what Hegel terms 'the deed' (*Tun*) (HW 3: 172) spells 'Evil', and how forgiveness tracks 'penitence' (*Reue*) and 'sacrifice' (*Aufopferung*) (HW 3: 176–7). Kierkegaard-inspired understandings of Hegel, like Wahl's and Adorno's, take Unhappy Consciousness to be the key form of consciousness around which to reconstruct the entire Hegelian corpus. For a treatment of the French line, see Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2008). It is also important for such purposes to note that Unhappy Consciousness is the first form of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* that takes an explicitly recognized contradiction as its starting point. It is the first such, one might say, that is ambivalent. One might argue in just this way that the Beautiful Soul is given *ab initio* as well (HW 3: 163–4).

political formation at the level of the *state*. At that level, the best romanticism can suggest are various utopian constructs to goad the development of the rudiments of social life that are consistent with the maintenance of irony. But at ‘subsidiary’ social levels, that is, levels of social phenomena at the ever-shifting borders between the political and the ‘merely social’, reciprocating and variable structures of self- and other-interpretation seem more plausible in accounting for many important aspects of social life. The question of what sort of social checks this interpretative picture can generate in order to preserve important values at this level also seems much more tractable (although much would have to be said to flesh it out). The power of romantic politics likely will reside at this subsidiary level. But, of course, this level is not *really* subsidiary at all if Schlegel is right; to conceive of it as subsidiary to full-blooded, state political order and function is just to reverse the order of precedence that the romantics insist upon in many different domains. They are interested in grassroots, ground-up conceptual emergence and are wary of the normalizing effect of perceived exigency. As we suggested in passing, one might see their view as a precursor to classical anarchism;¹²⁹ perhaps it even suggests a nineteenth-century version of Richard Rorty’s bifurcation of social life into two spheres: one private, in which irony is constitutive and among which there are various possible forms of overlapping imaginative conviviality, and one public, in which there is politics proper and in which irony will have little to no role. Rorty’s picture is not without its faults, but probably not such as to render the distinction an empty gambit.¹³⁰

* * *

It is possible now to see how Schlegel might have regarded Hegelian dialectic had he commented on it. For Schlegel, Hegelian dialectic is an overreaching attempt to regularize the interplay of contingency and criticism that romantic irony and the *Wechselerweis* aim both to express and to instill. The failure in question is a collapse back into a hybrid of the demand for self-determination emanating from modern metaphysics—primarily from Kant and Leibniz—and an amalgam of ancient literary and Christian conceptions of reconciliation to the world as it is. Schlegel works through this relationship of modern and ancient philosophy in precisely the opposite direction. As we saw in the last chapter, his earliest work on

¹²⁹ See NS 3: 517; KFSA 7: 24–5.

¹³⁰ I take it that Raymond Geuss is casting doubt on something like the romantic version of this split when he writes that the distinction between private and public does not ‘have the fundamental status of human finitude’. *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 112. For Rorty’s glancing consideration of romanticism, see his *Die Schönheit, die Erhabenheit und die Gemeinschaft der Philosophen* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 36–9.

Greek literature and philosophy is dismissive of modernity in its philhellenism. But he moves away from this position very quickly, appreciating better the unique circumstances of the modern European world and tempering the impulse to recreate it along Greek lines. In this he is on the same page as Hegel. Yet, Schlegel was in many ways even more impressed with the velocity of change the modern world harbors. Given this, unlike Hegel, Schlegel insists that the philosophical present as he knew it simply was too unformed to try to tamp down with a comprehensive 'scientific' philosophical theory. Hegelian dialectic succumbs, from Schlegel's perspective, to the quite understandable yearning for complete belonging in the world through knowledge. From Schlegel's vantage point, this yearning is ineluctable in humans, but its end cannot be realized, because standing apart from the world is also ineluctable. Hegel undialectically subordinates the one aspect of humanity to the other rather than allowing them to reciprocate without resolution. In other words, one might go so far as to turn the tables on Hegel and insist that Hegelian dialectic is an imperfect form of irony. We shall see Kierkegaard take something like this direction in chapter three, albeit by means of several modifications to the Jena conception of irony.

Our consideration of Hegelian reactions to romantic conceptions of sociality and polity has brought now us to the cusp of Hegel's critique of romantic aesthetics—a critique of irony on its classical home ground, i.e. *art*. Hegel's discussion of art in the *Phenomenology* treats it as a form of religion and is limited primarily to Greek and pre-Greek conceptions. As we saw, Hegel goes so far as to use a compound name for this series of forms of consciousness, *Kunstreligion*. In these forms the essential social role of art as cultic is primary. The *Phenomenology's* critique of romanticism, however, is not carried forth on specifically aesthetic grounds. In line with the taxonomy of these sections of the *Phenomenology*, had he delivered an aesthetic critique of romanticism, it would have had to be as art under the aspect of Revealed Religion given the modern conception of subjectivity involved in romantic art. Nor is there any specifically aesthetic critique in the *Encyclopedia*; although Hegel there differentiates 'Art', 'Religion', and 'Philosophy' as three distinct forms of what he calls 'Absolute Spirit',¹³¹ he does not discuss German romanticism.¹³² One finds such critique, rather, in his Berlin aesthetics lectures.¹³³

¹³¹ HW 10: 366ff. Again, I am using initial capitals because these are names of the three forms of Absolute Spirit.

¹³² Cf. HW 10: 369, where there is a statement about the concept of genius as the tipping point of Art into Religion, but it is not specific to romanticism.

¹³³ Hegel lectured on aesthetics five times, once in Heidelberg (1818) and four times at Berlin (1820–1, 1823, 1826, and 1828–9). H. G. Hotho, a student of Hegel, brought out an edition of Hegel's lectures in 1835 (second edition, 1842). Hotho's book was a compilation of Hegel's own lecture notes and lecture transcripts made by a series of auditors. There are student transcripts of Hegel's 1820–1,

The Aesthetic Dimension of Hegel's Critique

A primary component of Hegel's critique of Jena romanticism is his contention that it improperly installs both the production and reception of art as basic philosophical principles, in an attempt to aesthetically model Fichtean conceptions of subjectivity.¹³⁴ Art, for Hegel no less for Schlegel, is a philosophical subject of primary significance, and not merely because it holds one place among many on the philosophical ledger. Art is a particularly difficult subject for philosophical explanation, both historically and conceptually, for while the time in which Hegel wrote saw a rebirth of philosophical aesthetics, the philosophical suspicion of art as a cultural competitor to philosophy was also on the rise, the old contest that Plato tells us was well established in his time.¹³⁵ This emergence in tandem of serious philosophical reflection on the arts and the fear that some art might outpace philosophy as an intellectual force is alive for Hegel. This is clearly one of the things on his mind when he turns to romanticism as he understood it: a clutch of theories that promote artistic understanding at the expense of philosophy, capped off by a thinker such as Schlegel who argued that

1823, and 1826 lectures, all now published. Hotho's edition remains the standard one, and is the basis for Knox's English translation of the lectures. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert argues that Hotho interspersed his own views with Hegel's. See 'Einleitung. Gestalt und Wirkung von Hegels Ästhetik', in G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst. Berlin 1823* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), pp. xv–ccxiv and 'Einführung. Die systematische Bestimmung der Kunst und die Geschichtlichkeit der Künste: Hegels Vorlesung über "Aesthetiken sive philosophiam artis" von 1826', in G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst. Vorlesung von 1826*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert, J.-I. Kwon, and K. Berr (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 9–39. Most importantly, Hotho is alleged to have forced Hegel's aesthetics into a strict systematic mold provided by the *Encyclopedia*, a structure that is missing from the other sets of lectures (pp. xiii–xv). See Benjamin Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) for a judicious treatment of the issues. There is really no way at the current state of scholarship to settle these claims. The 1820–1, 1823, and 1826 lectures are only evidenced by student notes and would be trumped by Hegel's own manuscript; however, the only evidence for that manuscript is in Hotho's edition. There is no evidence of an autograph manuscript or even another copy of Hegel's own notes. Moreover, although Hegel published amended versions of the *Encyclopedia* up until his death, the major innovative structuring device of that work, the doctrine of Absolute Spirit, is present in it from 1818 on. This would cover the dates of all of the aesthetics lectures, even the Heidelberg ones, making it plausible that the less systematic nature of the lectures is due more to Hegel's attempts to bring the material under greater systematic control *seriatim* than to an inherently loose-jointed approach, which would be in stark contrast with Hotho's edition. In fact, one might even argue that there is good evidence in the student transcripts that Hegel structured the material more and more tightly according to what he took to be the requirements of 'the System' as one moves chronologically through the material. For the present, Gethmann-Siefert's case against the Hotho edition is too indirect to stand up; nevertheless, her painstaking attention to the *multiple* interpretative sources allow one to see deeper into the detailed way in which Hegel presents his views. In what follows, I will take the Hotho edition to be the most authoritative version of Hegel's view we now possess.

¹³⁴ See HW 11: 255–6.

¹³⁵ *Rep.* 607 b.

philosophical content and form was irreducibly art-like. Hegel confronts the difficulties forthrightly and offers an extremely integrated account of what seem to be some of the most potent elements and effects of art, many of which often travel under the banner of the non-conceptual. Giving a discursive account of what does not seem to be discursive is a very tricky business, as the romantics appreciated. Whatever else is involved, part of the trick is not to obscure the 'on the ground' experience of art by preforming it in accordance with a theory worked out ahead of time independent of the experience. As we have seen, Schlegel holds that, strictly speaking, it is not entirely possible to do this; there will always be some residue of potential meaning left unaccounted for by interpretation; the best one can do to structure one's account of interpretation to signal that eventuality. Hegel's view on the matter is in almost every way more ambitious.

A. Preliminaries: 'Absolute Spirit' and 'Art'

Along with Philosophy and Religion, Art is a form of what Hegel calls 'Absolute Spirit', i.e. Art is one of the three primary modes of the human expression of truth.¹³⁶ Art is a form of social cognition for Hegel and is thus of a piece with Philosophy; to the extent that philosophy itself is a proper object of philosophical reflection for Hegel (it is), so is Art. For Art the expressive medium is sensation, for Religion it is representation (for Hegel, something like thinking in images or pictures), and for Philosophy is it conceptual (i.e. expressly dialectical) thought. Hegel arranges these forms of Absolute Spirit and their media in a hierarchy, with the sensible thought of Art occupying the lowest station and the conceptual thought of Philosophy the highest. At any one point in history (i.e. in the development of *Geist*, as well as in chronological history) all forms of Absolute Spirit are co-present, but in varying degrees of their individual internal developments according to their relative positions in this hierarchy. To take a famous example: in Attic culture Art is supreme. Art's being supreme is not merely a matter of its enjoying more cultural prestige than religious or philosophical activity in Greek society; rather, it means that the whole of the society—religion and philosophy included—is organized to its foundation in aesthetic terms. Hegel

¹³⁶ See HW 10: 366–7. I use initial capitals for the forms of Absolute Spirit for the same reason stated with respect to forms of consciousness, i.e. that 'Art', 'Religion', and 'Philosophy' are proper names of the modes of Absolute Spirit. Hegel does not develop the idea of Absolute Spirit until the first edition of the *Encyclopedia*. So, while the idea structures the discussions in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, it plays no role in the treatment of art in the *Phenomenology*. An indispensable treatment of the doctrine is Dieter Henrich, 'Absoluter Geist und Logik des Endlichen', in *Hegel in Jena*, ed. D. Henrich and K. Düsing (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980), pp. 103–18.

glosses such organization as involving a more or less immediate, unreflective acceptance of given social being as expressive of self. This is not to say, of course, that Attic culture is wholly unreflective or that its reflective products are unimportant. It is to say rather that Art and the kind of cognition peculiar to it comprise the main categories of self-understanding within that society. From the point of view of the philosopher who has the benefit of (Hegelian) hindsight, one might say that Art's ascendancy in Attic culture is appropriate to the level of development of *Geist* as a whole at that point in history. Greek culture is religiously and philosophically underdeveloped in comparison with its leading artistic edge. Art, as the least sophisticated form of Absolute Spirit, is the form most adequate to the self-expression possible for *Geist* at that juncture. This is part of the meaning of Hegel's claim on behalf of Attic culture that it was the point at which art was 'perfected' or had 'ended'.¹³⁷ This does not, of course, mean that art ceases being made or that it is made thereafter in vain. Hegel holds that religious and philosophical advances are possible within Art's properly delineated conceptual ambit 'after its end'. The point is rather that Attic art achieves the perfection of *Art* as a medium of truth: *qua* art, art can do no better. Hegel is quite precise on the point: Attic *sculpture* is the 'end' of Art in this sense.¹³⁸

Hegel's hierarchy of the modes of Absolute Spirit, the structuring principle of the account of Absolute Spirit generally, raises a number of questions. The question that is most significant for our purposes has to do with the status of other modes of Absolute Spirit within stages they do not dominate. One can subdivide this question in two: (1) what is the status of a form of non-dominant Absolute Spirit in its *ascendancy*? and (2) what is the status of a form of non-dominant Absolute Spirit in its *decline*? As to (1), Hegel holds that the dominant form of Absolute Spirit enforces on others a mode of expression more or less like its own, recasting them in its own light. Take again the case of Attic Greece, with Art as the dominant form of Absolute Spirit. Religion and Philosophy are concurrent with Art but underdeveloped by their native standards, their essential modes of expression formed by Art. The claim that Religion is essentially artistic at this time may look almost self-evident given the obvious proximity of religion to myth and of myth to poetry. The claim may seem to some less defensible when it comes to Philosophy—after all, this is taken by many to be the 'Age of Plato'—and Hegel is well aware of this. But Hegel's contention is not that, on an absolute scale, Praxiteles' truth is better than Plato's. It is rather the more circumspect allegation that Art is superior because of its global culture-organizing force at this

¹³⁷ See HW 13: 25, 142.

¹³⁸ HW 14: 372–4.

time. Hegel appreciates better than most how marginal to Greek culture Socrates and Plato were; moreover, he emphasizes how Plato's own dialogic-poetic practice is an expression of Philosophy under the aspect of Art. Similar results follow in the transition from Religion as a dominant form of Absolute Spirit to Philosophy, where Hegel sees this happening in his own time in the passage from Protestantism to his own philosophy.

Even more pertinent to our discussion is (2), concerning the status of a non-dominant form of Absolute Spirit in decline, inasmuch as Art weathers two such declines, first at the hands of Religion and then Philosophy. To understand Hegel's account of the effect of a form of Absolute Spirit in decline—here, Art—one must resist conceiving of the overtaking of Art by Religion and Philosophy as a linear phenomenon. The decline of Art is not merely marked by its subservience *seriatim* to Religion and then Philosophy, i.e. Art does not just decline relative to Religion, and *then* relative to Philosophy. For, even though Philosophy is less developed than is Religion in, say, the European Middle Ages, Philosophy still undergoes internal development at that historical stage and, as a superior *developing* form of Absolute Spirit, exerts formative conceptual pressure on Art as well. Thus, Art's decline must be charted through its simultaneous domination both by Religion and by Philosophy. Philosophy and Religion *both* put their stamps on Art, and particularly on the equilibrium between its form (its sensuous mode of representation) and its content (the truths that anticipate those of Hegel's philosophy). Moreover, each exerts this influence on Art both while it is *dominant* and while it is *dominated* by the other: Religion does so first as *the* dominant form of Absolute Spirit and then itself as a form of declining influence; Philosophy does so first as *it* is configured by Religion and then as the (overall) dominant social expression of *Geist*.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ To complicate matters, Hegel also arranges the various arts, and various genres within them, into hierarchies. As to the former, he holds that there are three arts that achieve their perfect forms in Romantic Art, and achieve those perfections sequentially, one after the other: painting, music, and poetry. The arts do this, as does all Romantic Art, by revising their sensuous natures in light of the more abstract and advanced thought content they must embody. This leads to greater and greater abstraction on their parts. The broad view on offer here from Hegel is that painting, music, and poetry are already abstract enough in their essential forms to better accommodate developing religious and philosophical thought. Hegel charts this increasing capacity for abstraction in terms of a reduction of dependence on spatiality as a basis for artistic expression. The two-dimensionality of painting is more abstract than the three-dimensionality of sculpture, music lacks spatiality altogether, and poetry is a marriage of the two, the final medium in which art progresses. Poetry in its own advanced stages provides, so to speak, a second end to art—not the end of art as an *adequate* vehicle of *Geist*, but the end of art as a vehicle of *Geist* generally (HW 14: 231ff.). It is poetry that figures most prominently in Hegel's hope that there can be further progression in even Romantic Art at its terminal stage (see, e.g., HW 13: 142).

It is essential to mark these rather baroque taxonomic points because Hegel's discussion of the cognitive value of art generally, and of Romantic Art specifically, depends on them. What Hegel classes 'Romantic Art' one might call simply 'Art in the age of its supersession'. This broad category—and here Hegel is surely following Schlegel's nomenclature—comprehends all European art from the Hellenistic period, through medieval Christianity, up to Hegel's own time. Romantic Art is typified by an increasing mismatch between its content and its form: because culture in general has moved beyond the limited, immediately sensuous modes of presenting truth that characterize society in Art's ascendancy, the pressure on artistic form increases. Not only are inferior non-dominant modes of Absolute Spirit formed according to superior dominant modes (and to a lesser extent by its superior non-dominant modes), inferior modes attempt to resist the domination by preserving what they can of their native structure and adapting it to the demands of the superior modes. This means that there is a tension at the core of any inferior mode of Absolute Spirit between its own essential function and the adaptation of that function to ulterior forces. Art is thus set to the task of presenting the essentially non-sensuous thought of Religion and Philosophy in inherently sensuous media. In essence Art (like Religion, come its time) is hampered by or limited to what, as we have seen, Hegel calls 'bad infinity', i.e. a form of infinity that always has a part (a next step) outside of it and therefore is only a finite approximation of true infinity, which contains all. Art can only approximate such truth, and its approach is not even as far-reaching as is that of Religion, given that the inferior medium of sense establishes the limit in the case of Art.

Hegel holds that *romanticism* is Romantic Art at its ever-receding limit. It is thus Art itself at that limit. When Hegel turns to romanticism in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, accordingly, he is speaking about what he considers at once to be the *highest* form of Art (if Art is measured by how much philosophical content it attempts to accommodate) and its *lowest* form (if one measures instead Art's distance from its pinnacle in ancient Greece). Hegel's own taste in art seems to have been rather classicist, and his most trenchant critical judgments involve art whose greatness was settled at the time; for all the attention paid to his encomia to ancient art, that was old hat in Germany by the time of his mature writings. More original are his treatments of Renaissance and Reformation painting, particularly portraiture and genre painting, which stand out for their acumen and which exerted formative influence on the then-emerging discipline of art history.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ See Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), ch. 3, for the example of the art historian Karl Schnaase, who in 1818–19 attended Hegel's lectures

Hegel's understanding of music—for many *the* romantic art—is peculiarly unconvincing and has had less effect. His philosophy of literature—the main interest of the Jena circle—falls somewhere between these poles, both in its quality and effect. Hegel's analysis of Greek literature, and especially of ancient tragedy, is of the first order, but his handling of later literature is less sure, sometimes forcing phenomena to conform to theory. Still, Hegel cared about literature and literary history immensely, and it mattered to him a great deal that his judgments on it should be taken seriously. The philosophy of literature was, at least for the time that romanticism is centered in Jena, the proving ground for many core romantic precepts, and it was just there that Hegel entered the fray. Perhaps it is not beyond the pale to suggest that Hegel took literary models seriously enough for some of his own writings, and that he saw romantic philosophical form to be a competitor in terms of such use, both on account of the different content of Hegel's philosophical views and the way that content dictated what particular aesthetic form of philosophical presentation he deemed appropriate.¹⁴¹

B. Modern tragedy and comedy as preconditions to romanticism

Hegel initiates his analysis of tragedy and comedy in Romantic Art by contrasting them with their counterparts in Classical Art. A précis of Hegel's account of ancient tragedy is enough to establish the required background. Ancient tragedy, on Hegel's analysis of it, involves irreconcilable conflicts between the orders of domestic and political well-being. These orders are connected through a cycle of human generation and corruption. Male youths are born and nurtured in the maternal household with its hearth deities and given over for induction in the full life of the paternalistic *πόλις* to honor the Olympian gods and prosecute war. Death requires a return to the home and burial according to the rites that govern families.¹⁴² The action in *Antigone*, for Hegel the peak of Greek tragedy, involves an unavoidable disruption of this cycle. Kreon asserts the political right to deny burial to traitors, Antigone presses the sister's claim to bury her brother, and both are correct to do so. The tragedy consists in the inevitable 'collision' (*Kollision*) of these spheres.¹⁴³

One way to put the matter, although not one that is available to the Attic form of consciousness, is that tragedy registers a conflict or incompatibility between

and championed Dutch art on many of the same grounds Hegel offers. Schnaase's *Niederländische Briefe* (1834) virtually inaugurated the idea that art history is an autonomous field of study, and did so on Hegelian grounds. It is also an important source for Alois Riegl's idea of *Kunstwollen*.

¹⁴¹ For this suggestion, see Allen Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁴² HW 3: 322–3, 328ff.; see also HW 7: 319.

¹⁴³ See HW 17: 133.

notions of *necessity* and *contingency*. This is not a conflict between political law and apolitical lawlessness; it operates, rather, within the category of norms, between the determining, binding operation of laws and the extent to which the basis for that determination is available to the agents whose actions are so determined. In *Antigone* the laws of both the family and the city are known to be *necessary*, and it is also known that neither brooks exception. What is not known is how to reconcile them at a higher level of law. This is the *contingency* of the situation; it is a feature of the experience of law (that is, that laws might conflict irreconcilably with one another), *not* the absence of law. Further developments in science and philosophy leading up to the modern period change this picture substantially, as the necessity-contingency binary accommodates increases in human empirical wherewithal; nature no longer provides brute 'givens' that authoritatively determine values. Specifically, human projects of realizing or retaining sought ethical, political, and aesthetic values can no longer rest easy in the knowledge that nature provides a ready structure for such retention or realization. This is crucial, to Hegel's mind, for the development of modern notions of subjectivity. Accordingly, the art of this period is increasingly the art of the subject and, at its farthest reaches, is an art that takes the topic of subjectivity expressly as its subject matter. Because of the ease with which it can bring concepts to bear on the issues of contemporary life relative to the other arts, literature (at least of a certain type) is the most advanced artistic form for expressing this type of subjectivity. The aspect of literature most relevant to that expression is the subservience of narrative to individual character development—in essence, a reversal of the classical Aristotelian view on the relation of plot to character.¹⁴⁴

The mainspring of Hegel's discussion of Romantic tragedy and comedy is the alleged development in late Medieval chivalric romance of what he comes to call 'inwardness' (*Innerlichkeit*), which operates at the intersection of concepts of romantic honor, chivalric love, and fidelity.¹⁴⁵ The nexus of these qualities undergoes further development via an increasing awareness of a self-enclosed, inner, and sanctified realm of 'personality', the depth and even reality of which is dependent on some externalization in action. Externalization for Hegel is the process through which alone what is internal is even there internally in the first place. This dependency is a specific expression of an entirely general principle in

¹⁴⁴ See *Poet.* 1452b28–1454a15.

¹⁴⁵ HW 14: 192–4. Inwardness is, technically speaking, a term that Hegel deploys when he discusses the second type of tragic response discussed below. Hegel at times uses the term 'Innigkeit' to denote intense inwardness.

Hegel's thought that we have already discussed: that is, that part of any claim to 'substantiality' that issues from the 'subject side' of the subject-object dyad is a minimal, if unstated, expectation that the world is receptive to the subject's agency.¹⁴⁶ At the tipping point of this development of inwardness, there is a deep and stark isolation of the agent from nature as an independent source of value, which isolation tokens a nagging anxiety concerning whether inwardness, so understood, is really 'substantial'. Inwardness is, as it were, a small, infinitely pure flame under glass, one that needs oxygen to burn yet also needs to be shielded from even the slightest movement of air that might cause it to gutter and extinguish. Dialectically speaking, such internal purity is always purchased at the price of an impoverished conception of the structural complexity and integrity of the external world. Full-bodied externalization of such a pure inward state is not compatible with the messy fecundity of nature.

This impoverished conception of the structure of the external world, coupled with the insistence upon externality of action, results in simplifying idealizations of that world that render it pliant to inwardness. Inwardness fashions an external correlate to itself, the 'Lord', which provides a formal unifying and objectifying point for love, honor, and fidelity. As art develops in terms of the dialectic of pure inwardness and hollow externality, it is set on the task of articulating more complexly structured forms of inwardness, on the one hand, and, on the other, of connecting those forms with ever more concrete conceptions of the external world in all its particularity. According to this formula, characters become ever more individuated and, therefore, individual, with their intentions, desires, needs, and demands providing the themes for art. Such individuals also increasingly come to view the world external to them as a sphere in which they can rationally expect, plan, or hope for the realization of their central projects. Tragedy in the period of Romantic Art is a meditation on the career of this inward conception of individuality situated in a world in which extra-individual ethical authority is problematic. Hegel concentrates his discussion on Shakespeare, finding that he can chart the conceptual terrain that modern tragedy traverses primarily in three main dramas—*Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and *Hamlet*. One possible understanding of the role of individuality in such a world is that the individuality of the tragic hero has 'firmness' (*Festigkeit*).¹⁴⁷ *Macbeth* is especially illustrative, though Hegel also includes *Othello* and *Richard III* as examples. Macbeth acts according to his own sense of willed effect, with little or no regard for how the contingencies of the world may or may not cooperate with his action. The tragedy consists in the

¹⁴⁶ Cf. the impetus of 'Evil' in the *Phenomenology* to externalize conviction.

¹⁴⁷ HW 14: 199–202.

world rebuffing the action.¹⁴⁸ This rebuttal is not only unforeseen by Macbeth and thus experienced as a disappointment or obstacle; it is unforeseeable, given the firmness of the individuality that provokes it, and thus experienced as entirely outside the domain of individuality. Firmness is here intransigence. Individuality is a self-enclosed sphere in the drama, as it were, outside of which there is initially no real meaning, so that, when the world rejects the efficacy of Macbeth's action, that rejection has no meaningful construction from within the ambit of the individual. This is a Romantic version of the non-individualized collision in ancient tragedy (although, anticipating Nietzsche, Hegel allows that there are the beginnings of this modern sort of tragedy in Euripides).¹⁴⁹ This firmness of character is merely 'formal', i.e. it is dialectically unresponsive: situations in the world are various and require judgment sensitive to that variation, whereas firmness in character is possible only if abstracted from that condition of its application in the world.

The second type of Romantic tragedy does not involve acting in the world as if it might be bent to one's steadfast and implacable will. Instead, individuality seeks its substantiality in the attempt to turn its back on the world as something merely contingent and, therefore, meaningless to it. Although elsewhere Hegel treats the sublime as a religious category pertaining to the epoch of Symbolic Art, here he allows that this inwardness is a Romantic form of sublimity, the experience of which is triggered by the perceived infinite depth of one's individuality. Hegel mentions *Romeo and Juliet*, but he takes *The Tempest* to be exemplary of this strategy.¹⁵⁰ He only adumbrates what must be the main thought. Like Juliet, Miranda is a child-like figure whose individuality bursts forth in the action of the play as if out of nowhere. Both girls are products of intense seclusion in which they are thrown back on their own resources as the only fund for character development. As mere hearsay to them, the world external to the palace or to the

¹⁴⁸ HW 14: 200–3.

¹⁴⁹ HW 14: 184–5.

¹⁵⁰ Hegel also mentions Goethe's 'Der König in Thule', a poem embedded in *Faust* I.2759–82 (HW 14: 207). This poem, composed separately in 1774 but present in the so-called *Urfaust* and the *Faust-Fragment*, as well as the *Faust* proper, was quite famous by the time of Hegel's writing and remained so throughout the nineteenth century. It is composed in a self-consciously antiquated ballad form, whose simplicity obviously attracts Hegel. Hegel quotes from the end of the poem:

Er sah ihn stürzen, trinken
Und sinken tief ins Meer,
Die Augen täten ihm sinken,
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr.
(ll. 2779–82)

Hegel stresses the conceit of investing unspoken love in secret things (in this case, the thrown goblet, which no one shall possess, including the king). This is not a matter of symbolism but of projection onto a thing of a love that is otherwise secreted in the depths of the soul—a kind of echo in reverse.

concealed island is easily idealized. Miranda, a castaway with her magus father for the last twelve of her fifteen years, offers the purer instance of this idealization. When Prospero causes the shipwreck of his brother, Miranda's reaction is of just this sort:

The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch,
But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's check,
Dashes the fire out. O! I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer. A brave vessel
(Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her)
Dash'd all to pieces! O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.
(I.ii.3–9)

Miranda conjures, as it were, her own naïve idea, the only one she can manage from within her isolated experience, of the sailors as 'noble' souls whose value is all the more evident when they are crushed by chaotic, soulless nature. Both Juliet and Miranda react to the intrusions of the world external to their hermetic surroundings not by fleeing from it but by recasting it as a mirror of their internal worlds. When discrete action is called for—and here Hegel turns to *Hamlet*—the action at first appears to be as rash as Macbeth's, but there is an important difference.¹⁵¹ Macbeth's actions are rash because his demonic character 'approaches evil' (*dem Bösen nähert*).¹⁵² He acts out of the tacit assumption that he can overpower the world, i.e. that the world is inherently so malleable as to receive and render meaningful *any* of his actions. Hamlet's deeds, to the contrary, have their source in upheaval, not extrusion. They are products of his over-refined sense of interiority and of his related ability to parse arbitrarily many courses of action according to how well they confirm his ever-deepening sense of self-subtlety, which is reminiscent of the Beautiful Soul.¹⁵³ He acts out of indecision, which finally reaches a fever pitch, *not* in a well-crafted decision, but in a purgation of the turmoil of his very inability to decide.

Romantic comedy takes the part of the world over and against individuality of both sorts.¹⁵⁴ Comedy is essentially comeuppance according to Hegel, wherein

¹⁵¹ HW 14: 207–8.

¹⁵² HW 14: 202. The reference to evil is of course no throwaway. Hegel means for the reader to link Macbeth with a proto-romantic idea of a hero, which develops, in Hegel's estimation, from Shakespeare, through Milton's Satan, to Goethe's Faust and, with comic inflection, Byron's Manfred (or, better yet, Byron himself as Manfred).

¹⁵³ Cf. Hegel's claim that Hamlet possesses a 'beautiful inner soul' (HW 14: 208).

¹⁵⁴ Hegel treats modern comedy as a sub-species of *Abenteuerlichkeit* (adventurousness) (HW 14: 211–16). *Abenteuer* is a broad literary genre in German letters, not limited to 'adventure stories'. Its main theme is the passing out of the world of the everyday into unknown territory, geographical

idealized conceptions of individuality come to naught in ways that open the audience's (and sometimes the characters') eyes to the mismatch between what they initially viewed as effective agency and what the actual effects of their agency are. There are two main types of Romantic comedy, subjective and objective.¹⁵⁵ Romantic treatments of medieval and early Renaissance chivalric romance are representative of the first type. In Ariosto and Cervantes, the earnestness of the protagonist is mocked by events, so that nothing he treats as the appropriate object of seriousness is actually such an object.¹⁵⁶ This holds especially in love, the primary modality of his experience: he is 'pure of heart', and thus apt to idealize the object of love as unapproachably 'holy', but a conspiracy of events regularly places him in situations in which the appropriate sort of love is, in all possible senses, 'profane'. Although Hegel does not further develop the claim, one might say that Ariosto handles this material with a little more tenderness than does Cervantes; in the first instance one has the wry *sorriso aristesco* and in the second a more ribald treatment. It is significant that both authors insert themselves into the text—Ariosto by asides to the reader, Cervantes more pervasively in the second part of the *Quixote*—in a gesture that becomes important to Hegel as a mark of end-stage Romantic Art. Chivalric romance 'dissolves' (*löst auf*) from within, and precisely this forced dissolution is comic. The works are bifurcated into a level on which romance-ideals are deployed with almost clinical purity and a level on which the work acknowledges the toll of the world on those ideals. Because the narrative structure of chivalric romance depends for its unity on the undiminished force of the romance-ideal, and because this ideal fails the strict examination of the world as it is, standard chivalric narrative structure is compromised. This breakdown in the structuring narrative principle creates a space for the authorial voice on the side of the real world. That is, what otherwise would be an intrusion, to disorienting effect, from without the work is made legitimate within the work itself by its autonomous structural compromise. In Hegel's view, certain of Shakespeare's plays are subject to similar disintegrations; he cites the cases of Falstaff and of the Fool in *King Lear*.¹⁵⁷ Neither character is simply comic by modern standards, of course—not Falstaff in the histories, at

or otherwise. The central idea is that the wilderness, say, presents the hero with events that are, from his ordinary perspective, strange and even haphazard. The organizing principle of the hero's experience then is a conjunction of the hero's attempts to make sense of the situation in which he finds himself and the whirr of events that objectively outstrip these attempts. Hegel treats the *Commedia*, for example, as representative of *Abenteuer* (HW 14: 214–15).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Hegel's treatment of 'subjective' and 'objective' humor, discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ HW 14: 217–18. To my knowledge Hegel never mentions Rabelais in any of his writings, whose scatological humor might have been in any case too much for him.

¹⁵⁷ HW 14: 218.

least (*Merry Wives of Windsor* is an exception), and especially not the Fool. Rather, they are both key to the tragic valence of those plays.

C. 'Humor' and romantic irony

Humor is a product of this developing tendency of Romantic Art to reinvigorate the category of individuality by inserting authorial presence more explicitly into the text.¹⁵⁸ Humor involves the deepened duality that is at the heart of both modern tragedy and comedy, the duality between demonic or angelic individuality, on the one hand, and a world that frustrates those conceptions, on the other. In the 'object-realm', the world is mundane and transformed into something meaningful only by artistic invention. In the 'subject-realm', art bears the extra burden of having to house in all explicitness artistic intent. This means that artistic forms—genres, art-types, and narrative structures—are open to reinvention and that it is unexceptional that the author may be present in the work. This presence can be accomplished by formal devices that are standard to the art, such as narrative point of view, heightened description of the internal states of characters, etc. But it can also be more intrusive: interruptions in the narrative in the form of parabasis, the inclusion of the author as a non-autobiographical character in the work, etc.¹⁵⁹ German literary romanticism is replete with such techniques.

Given Hegel's general view that art must be audience-responsive in order to bind people together in a common understanding, art that aims at disrupting audience expectations or that is aimed at 'incomprehensibility' is on the verge of not being art at all.¹⁶⁰ Hegel terms this primary stage of humor 'subjective'. It is bent on achieving its effects by undermining easy aesthetic response. Hegel's characterization of subjective humor leaves little room for doubt that he means to include romantic irony under it.¹⁶¹ Such artistic practice attempts to embody

¹⁵⁸ 'Humor' is, of course, a loan word in German, a fact that Schopenhauer emphasizes when making a strong contrast between it and comedy. See *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. W. von Löhneysen (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1960), 2: 128–35. In modern philosophical usage it has to do with either the affective response to a cognitive state (e.g. I find your tendency to resist evolutionary theory amusing) or just that state as a response to a stimulus (e.g. I am amused by such resistance when I come across it). One strand of the modern consideration of humor stresses sudden shifts in perspective as humorous, which is clearly in the background of Hegel's understanding of subjective humor.

¹⁵⁹ HW 14: 229f.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, HW 15: 496–7. Here I suspect I am in disagreement with Robert Pippin. See 'What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)', in *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 284. Of course, society might develop in such a way that audience expectations encompass such effects.

¹⁶¹ HW 13: 97. See, for instance, Hegel's use of the verb 'annihilate' to describe the intended authorial effect on any given content in subjective humor, a term of art he takes from Schlegel (HW 14: 229, 230). That said, the overlap of the categories 'irony' and 'subjective humor' in Hegel is difficult to determine precisely.

certain philosophical principles, but because art cannot at this point in its history optimally express philosophical reasoning, the literature of subjective humor distorts philosophical views in this very attempt. This distortion is a matter of preemption: the art of subjective humor arrogates to itself the task of primary philosophical expression, claiming that art and only art can limn the relevant truths. It is not so much the content of the artistic views that result from the arrogation that is suspect (though it is) as it is the fact that, according to Hegel, art is in no position to make the assignment to itself in the first place. Artistic practice according to romantic philosophical precepts treats the world as nothing more or less than purely fungible material for subjective forming; no one form is better than others.¹⁶² On Hegel's interpretation, at the end-stages of late Romantic Art, theory infiltrates art in the form of the wanton assertion of authorial power to disrupt all manner of standard, received literary devices, the effect of which is completely to displace what is proper to fiction with forms of subjectivity that are external to it. Subjective humor is the perversion and derangement of any possible stability of art by means of arbitrary wit and subjective outlook, a conception of the mastery of content by form that is the precise reverse of what would be philosophically progressive. If comedy generally trades in the *knowing* register within the work that ill-considered plans founder upon the contingencies of the world, then subjective humor is an *all-too-knowing* retrenchment into subjectivity in spite of the world. This latter falsely narrows the gap between contingency and willfulness by devaluing the particular outcomes of the conjunction of wit and world, all for the sake of enjoying the sheer play of forms and ideas.

Although he off-handedly mentions Hamann and Tieck as practitioners and targets Schlegel,¹⁶³ Hegel singles out the theater and novels of Friedrich Richter, better known under the pseudonym 'Jean Paul', as exemplary of subjective humor.¹⁶⁴ Works of subjective humor are inherently absurd, according to Hegel, and the absurdity is reflected in their reflexive narrative structure—an author's humorous wit can attack even the artifice of the work, a typical feature of Jean Paul's writings. The shared structure with irony is obvious, but it is difficult to establish on the basis of the text the degree to which Hegel takes Jean Paul and Schlegel to be different expressions of a single view. One might differentiate subjective humor from irony in two roughly Hegelian ways. The first is that Jean Paul never claims for humor a universal significance. Second and more telling, Jean Paul's subjective humor does not contain within it, according to Hegel, a denial of the presence of the universal within particularity. What subjective

¹⁶² HW 13: 93–9.

¹⁶³ HW 11: 336.

¹⁶⁴ HW 14: 229–31.

humor does instead is to juxtapose these two elements of the Concept. This results in a web-like interplay of events and ideas, and in the dissolution of standard genres. There is nothing dialectical about it, unlike irony. Hegel thus writes that in subjective humor ‘man sieht nichts werden, alles nur verpuffen’.¹⁶⁵

As an aside, one might question how close Hegel’s portrayal of Jean Paul is to the real article. The degree of accuracy of Hegel’s rendition of Jean Paul is difficult to pin down, because Jean Paul’s theoretical writings on art are just as slippery as are his more literary ventures. His main work in systematic aesthetics is the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804), which, as the title indicates, is yet another entry into the field of the romantic aesthetic primer. Perhaps for reasons of publicity, Jean Paul took some care to emphasize his conceptual distance from the Jena circle, crafting his account by retooling Kant’s aesthetics and adopting much of its technical vocabulary. The cast of his views in pertinent part can be taken from his statement that humor is an ‘inverse sublime’.¹⁶⁶ Humor ‘negates’ or ‘annihilates’ the situational empirical limitation of subjects by juxtaposing the empirical world with idealizations of how the world might be imagined at its extremes. The aim of the juxtaposition is to foreground the contingency of the world as finite beings experience it over and against the immutability that undergirds it. It is precisely *not* the goal to extrapolate from the humorous situation to other possible ways of life; humor operates on the ideal level paratactically, by placing side-by-side ‘the finite’ with ‘the infinite’. Its effect is thus to offer a glimpse behind the veil of illusion by, so to speak, stepping on the veil.¹⁶⁷ Put another way, humor makes human limitations *tolerable* by revealing how *unimportant* they are. Jean Paul is not above offering an ironic free-for-all in the form of a cautionary tale, as the characterization of Rocquairol in the novel *Titan* demonstrates, but it is crucial to keep in mind that the irony is in the service of the cautionary tale. This is a completely different result from that sought by Schlegelian irony, as Hegel views it.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ HW 14: 230. Knox’s English translation runs: ‘we see nothing develop, everything just explodes’. This robs Hegel’s prose of some of its wit. ‘*Verpuffen*’ is ‘to pop’, as might happen to balloons or soap bubbles, and carries with it the sense of ‘going flat’. Hegel is not saying that the effect of subjective humor is explosive, but rather that it plays with insubstantialities and ‘goes pop’ at the end. This is much more in keeping with his claim that it is frustrating and boring at the same time.

¹⁶⁶ JPSW 11: 111–12.

¹⁶⁷ JPSW 11: 19.

¹⁶⁸ Thus I differ with René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 2: 107–8, who also mentions Rocquairol but draws the usual conclusion that Jean Paul is quite close to Schlegel. By far the best treatment of Jean Paul’s aesthetic theory, albeit a short one, is in Peter Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie I* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1974).

In any case, subjective humor is not Hegel's last word in Romantic Art. He writes that there is 'so to speak' (*gleichsam*) a brand of humor that is by contrast 'objective'. He gives as examples such luminaries as Sterne and the Goethe of the *West-östlicher Divan*,¹⁶⁹ the less stellar Friedrich Rückert (whose poems are best known as set by Mahler),¹⁷⁰ and the all-but-forgotten Theodor Gottfried von Hippel.¹⁷¹ Although Hegel is not as precise as one might like, objective humor differs from its subjective counterpart by its heightened awareness of the interdependency of the universal and particular thematic elements. Whereas subjective humor stops at the revelation of contingency with an imputation of some underlying objective structure against which the contingency is revealed, objective humor goes further, giving both a deeper sense of order and a sense of the necessity of the revelation of contingency.¹⁷² The Yiddish saying that 'Man plans; God laughs' captures the sentiment, as does the related phenomenon of the 'Lubitsch touch'.¹⁷³ Narratives governed by objective humor present their protagonists as hapless in their vulnerability to innocuous mishaps. Such humor retreats from the prideful display of authorial subjectivity and substitutes for it a much lighter, less skeptical, and more knowing, tolerant touch. It is self-referential, as is its subjective counterpart, but regards itself with unsentimental resilience: the objectively humorous hero catches a glimpse of receding former selves calmly, as if tenderly regarding them in a rearview mirror as she travels past, rather than as a total breakdown—the mere *Verpuffen*, Hegel might say—of her projects. So, while objective humor directs subjective play back onto itself, the effect of such reflexive applications is to undercut the false heroism that Hegel takes to be at the heart of subjective humor's self-understanding.¹⁷⁴ Objective humor presupposes an accumulated and progressive sense of growth in oneself, where it makes sense to re-identify with how one used to be and treat that younger self with slightly superior kindness. Dialectically speaking, the skepticism with which subjective humor treats the world is universalized to apply reflexively to subjective humor itself, which produces a qualified *stability* of humor relative to the world. The 'world of literature', for instance, is accepted

¹⁶⁹ Goethe's model here is Hāfēz's *ghazals*. Goethe knew him through Joseph von Hammer's 1814 translation into German, as did Hegel. Hegel compares Hāfēz and Goethe in summary form at HW 13: 475–7 and lauds the Persian poet's subtlety in terms that are not foreign to objective humor. See HW 15: 428, see also HW 13: 525–6. Schlegel was an admirer as well. Schlegel's interest in Persian (Indo-Iranian) languages was focused primarily at Zoroastrian texts and the overlap with Sanskrit. I do not know whether he would have been able to read the poems in the Middle Persian original.

¹⁷⁰ HW 14: 242. ¹⁷¹ HW 11: 336. ¹⁷² HW 14: 231–2.

¹⁷³ The best example of which, in this connection, is *Ninotchka* (1939, dir. E. Lubitsch).

¹⁷⁴ HW 14: 230, 239–41.

as constituted by literature without antecedent bounds, but also without the first flush of authorial power overwhelming the thought of such a world; neither the artist nor the world of art is of transcendent importance. (Oddly enough, it is just irony's application of itself to itself in this way that, for Schlegel, drives irony deeper into modern conceptions of self.) Objective humor establishes a more substantial connection between individuality and extra-subjective reality by immersing its non-heroic yet inventive self in the *mundane*—a prosaic world of particular yet non-unique things. The proper unifying attitude is one of subjective devotion to what is 'fleeting'.¹⁷⁵ The mention of Sterne is perhaps most revealing. Hegel no doubt has *Tristram Shandy* in view, also a favorite of the romantics. What the romantics see as its precedent-setting disruptive narrative insouciance, however, Hegel treats as a sign of its good-natured resignation to the world of the 'adventurous'. Hegel must be interpreting *Shandy* as closer in spirit to the picaresque sensibility of Fielding or the satire of Swift than to the meta-fiction it was to inspire in Hegel's time. So understood, his gambit pivots the work, otherwise so inspirational to his philosophical competitors, on a dialectical footing that yields more moderate claims for the philosophical and cultural role of art.

Without artistic form evaporating entirely into theory, this is as far as art can go according to Hegel.¹⁷⁶ Objective humor is the closest art can get to the truth of Hegelian philosophy, just as ironic art is the pinnacle of truth for Schlegel. An important proviso accompanies this comparative statement, of course, viz. that Hegel holds that no art is adequate to truth, while Schlegel thinks ironic art is precisely the truth. But when one recalls that, according to Schlegel, *no* human enterprise can reflect the absolute, then perhaps the comparison is closer than one might first think. Objective humor then stands sentinel to art's second end in late romanticism for Hegel. He writes: 'endlich zeigt sich das Zerfallen der Seiten, deren vollständige Identität den eigentlichen Begriff der Kunst abgibt, und dadurch die Zerfallenheit und Auflösung der Kunst selbst.'¹⁷⁷ Hegel clearly means here the dissolution of art as a whole and not just of Romantic Art. Things that dissolve on their own often are things that dissipate under their own weight;

¹⁷⁵ HW 14: 240. Knox's translation also slightly misleads here. Hegel writes that the activity of objective humor 'ein Einfall, der aber nicht bloß zufällig und willkürlich, sondern eine innere Bewegung des Geistes ist'. Knox tracks 'Einfall' with the English 'fugitive', which is over-determining even if lexically correct. All Hegel means here is that the state is *fleeting*, which is but one meaning of 'fugitive'. 'Einfall' need not connote, as the English 'fugitive' usually does, fleeing or hiding from something.

¹⁷⁶ This leaves open the question of how limpid Hegelian theory is when extended into the future as an interpretation of at least some aspects of modernist art. For a partial defense of such an extension, see Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ HW 14: 198.

they are already in such a tenuous state that little external pressure needs to bear upon them in order that they collapse. If one adds to this Hegel's generally moralizing tone when discussing late-Romantic Art, then one might say that, for Hegel, end-state Romantic Art is dissolute, not merely dissolved. This resonates with other remarks Hegel makes concerning humor in late Romantic art, e.g. that it is not truly 'aesthetic'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ HW 13: 13. What are the implications of Romantic Art being non- or even anti-aesthetic for Hegel? Dieter Henrich and Robert Pippin, if I understand them correctly, hold different versions of the view that Hegel's aesthetics is still of considerable importance for understanding modern art, even art after Hegel's death. See Henrich, 'Kunst und Kunstphilosophie der Gegenwart', in *Immanente Ästhetik—Ästhetische Reflexion*, ed. W. Iser (München: Hanser, 1966), pp. 11–32; 'The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel's Aesthetics', in *Hegel*, ed. M. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 199–207; and Pippin, *After the Beautiful*. See also Pippin, 'What Was Abstract Art?' and 'The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's Aesthetics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. F. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For Pippin, the sort of subjectivity that non-aesthetic modern art pursues is bourgeois and prosaic. For Henrich, it is an extension of some of what he takes to be the most valuable insights of the romanticism of Hölderlin. But the most far-reaching possible implication would be that Hegel is a harbinger of the Danto-like view that anything might be art. Hegel states:

Das Verwachsensein mit solcher spezifischen Beschränktheit des Inhalts endlich hob der Humor, der alle Bestimmtheit wankend zu machen und zu lösen wußte, wieder auf und ließ die Kunst dadurch über sich hinausgehen. In diesem Hinausgehen jedoch der Kunst über sich selber ist sie ebensosehr ein Zurückgehen des Menschen in sich selbst, ein Hinabsteigen in seine eigene Brust wodurch die Kunst alle feste Beschränkung auf einen bestimmten Kreis des Inhalts und der Auffassung von sich abstreift und zu ihrem neuen Heiligen den *Humanus* macht, die Tiefen und Höhen des menschlichen Gemüths als solchen, das Allgemeinmenschliche in seinen Freuden und Leiden, seinen Bestrebungen, Taten und Schicksalen. Hiermit erhält der Künstler seinen Inhalt an ihm selber und ist der wirklich sich selbst bestimmende, die Unendlichkeit seiner Gefühle und Situationen betrachtende, ersinnende uns ausdrückende Menschgeist, dem nichts mehr fremd ist, was in der Menschenbrust lebendig werden kann. Es ist dies ein Gehalt, der nicht an und für sich künstlerisch bestimmt bleibt, sondern die Bestimmtheit des Inhalts und des Ausgestaltens der willkürlichen Erfindung überläßt, doch kein Interesse ausschließt, da die Kunst nicht mehr das nur darzustellen braucht, was auf einer ihrer bestimmten Stufen absolute zu Hause ist, sondern alles, worin der Mensch überhaupt heimisch zu sein die Befähigung hat. (HW 14: 237–8)

This is a crucial passage and deserves extended comment. Hegel holds that inwardness gains in substantiality the more the idea is downplayed that the appropriate subject matter of art is pre-given by the world external to the art. One might read this passage to forward the claim that anything at all might be art so long as it is intended to be: 'die Kunst *alle feste Beschränkung auf einen bestimmten Kreis des Inhalts und der Auffassung von sich abstreift*' (emphasis added). And when Hegel adds later in the passage that all 'material' is permitted on account of the fact that 'nichts mehr fremd ist, was in der Menschenbrust lebendig werden kann' and that art need not restrict itself to what 'auf einer ihrer bestimmten Stufen absolute zu Hause ist, sondern alles, worin der Mensch überhaupt heimisch zu sein die Befähigung hat', this might reinforce that broad reading. But, as is clear from the context of the sentence under consideration, Hegel is not making this unrestricted claim. Rather, he is taking it for granted that inward subjectivity is the 'ground zero' of cutting edge art and then saying that, *given that assumption*, content is not a concern. To put the point in a more technical

All in all, Hegel's long view on the philosophical significance of literature in the modern period, leading up to irony and encompassing his own preferred objective humor as focal conceptions of artistic value, is based on a sustained argument to the conclusion that 'subjectivity' is the characteristically dominant mode of self-understanding at play in Romantic Art. Nevertheless, he also seems to hold that some Romantic Art retains cultural centrality as a mode of cognition that deals with themes involving subjectivity.¹⁷⁹ Romantic Art's self-conscious formal adaptation to the expression of these themes is endemic to it and, for the most part, unproblematic. However, as those formal innovations accelerate due to the greater expressive demands placed on Art by the development of the philosophical resources of modernity, Art and Philosophy inevitably drift further apart. At what Hegel considers the limit of this development, it occurs to Art that its formal resources are so vast and plastic that it too can do what properly dialectical philosophy can do, and can indeed do it better. Hegel seems to understand the attraction of the position but ultimately takes it to be a distortive view of art. Its result, he holds, is a retreat from the world into a purified realm of subjective isolation and willfulness. This evaluation is of a piece with his analysis both of 'Conscience' in the *Phenomenology* and of Schlegel's ironic rival to Hegelian dialectic.¹⁸⁰

Excursus: The Importance of Karl Solger

Hegel's relationship to Karl Solger was brief and professional. They were colleagues for only one year in the same faculty at Berlin, from Hegel's appointment there in 1818 until Solger's death in 1819. Their extant correspondence consists in one letter from Solger to Hegel, in which Solger thanks Hegel for his

way: all of Hegel's statements about the contingency of content take it for granted that *intent*—here construed as a version of self-determination—is dialectically constant. Art that subtracts out subjectivity simply would not count as 'vital' (*lebendig*).

¹⁷⁹ So, one can hold, with Jacques Taminiaux, that '[l]a théorie speculative se fonde . . . sur le principe du nécessaire dépassement de l'art' without claiming that art loses *all* philosophical warrant according to Hegel. See 'Spéculation et différence: remarques sur le statut speculative de l'art', in *Hegels Logik der Philosophie. Religion und Philosophie in der Theorie des absoluten Geistes*, ed. D. Henrich and R.-P. Horstmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), p. 268.

¹⁸⁰ It is perhaps not going too far to say that Hegel's account of objective humor (as well as his accounts of comedy and humor more broadly) is positioned dialectically at the final point of the immediacy-alienation-assimilation conceptual triad. Comedy and humor feature a knowing, palliative, and critical distance from tragic alienation. Subjective humor and a fortiori romantic irony are, so to speak, belatedly tragic—i.e. they display the tension of being unable to reconcile oppositions that still seem ineliminable. Subjective humor and romantic irony attempt to cope with this state of affairs by denying the particular tension its focal role. Objective humor has worked through the tension as focal and assimilated it on that ground.

willingness to exchange lectures and expresses his admiration and his hope that they will become personally and philosophical close.¹⁸¹ Solger, like Hegel a journeyman academic prior to his appointment at Berlin, was one of the main forces in securing the position for Hegel there.¹⁸² Nevertheless, over this short period of time they apparently grew to be close, so much so that Hegel's only burial instructions were that he wished to be interred near Fichte and Solger.¹⁸³ (He is buried next to Fichte, a few plots away from Solger.)

By the time Hegel arrived in Berlin, Solger had been lecturing there for seven years, mainly on topics in the philosophy of literature and aesthetics more generally. Hegel's Berlin lectures in aesthetics all post-date Solger's death in 1819 (Hegel's first lecture in Berlin on the topic was in Wintersemester 1820/21). Nevertheless, Hegel had lectured on the subject in Heidelberg just prior to his Berlin appointment, in *Sommersemester* 1818, and it is fair to speculate that his decision to lecture repeatedly on the topic in the 1820s was at least in part influenced by his high regard for the level of philosophical discussion Solger's own lectures had introduced at the university and Hegel's wish to continue that legacy. There are unsettled questions concerning precisely how much Hegel knew, and at what time, about Solger's views. Aside from the scanty correspondence, which does not broach any significant philosophical issues, the first indication that Hegel is aware of the details of Solger's position is in a lengthy footnote to section 140 of the *Philosophy of Right*, written in 1820 and published a year later.¹⁸⁴ Hegel's most extensive consideration of Solger is in his 1828 review of Solger's *Nachgelassene Schriften* (1826), which collection Tieck edited. Hegel assisted Tieck in preparing the philosophical material for the volume, and was involved with Solger's work to that extent in 1825–6 as well.¹⁸⁵ All of Hegel's writing on Solger fastens on Solger's views on irony and Solger's critique of rival romantic views of the same. Aside from the covert analysis in the Evil section of the *Phenomenology*, the sections on humor from the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and section 140 of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's fullest assessment of the aesthetic

¹⁸¹ See Letter of Solger to Hegel, V.1818, in *Hegel Briefe*, 3rd ed., ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1969), II: 189.

¹⁸² Hegel's appointment, like all appointments at German universities, had a bit of drama. Schleiermacher, who explicitly disowned 'speculative philosophy', nonetheless joined Solger in support of Hegel. The main reason was that, otherwise, he feared Fries would be appointed.

¹⁸³ No doubt being buried next to Fichte was the main point. That said, Hegel was present at Solger's funeral. See Letter of Hegel to Creutzer, 30.X.1819, in *Hegel Briefe* II: 220.

¹⁸⁴ HW 7: 277–8 n.

¹⁸⁵ See KSNS I: xvi. Tieck constructed the *Schriften* along biographical, and even autobiographical lines, intermingling entries from Solger's diaries and correspondence with his published works in order to paint a picture of the 'whole man' and his *Lebensbahn*. This way of editing papers post-mortem is decidedly romantic of course.

dimensions of romantic irony appears in his 1828 review of Solger's *Nachlaß*. It is hard not to speculate that growing proximity to Solger's acted as a catalyst for Hegel's own approach to romanticism in the aesthetics lectures of the 1820s. Indeed, one can well imagine that there was more to it than that. We come back to this point at the conclusion of this section.

A. Solger on irony

Solger was an intimate of Tieck and, accordingly, his knowledge of contemporary sources of irony was firsthand. There are three main sources for Solger's views on irony: his philosophical dialogue *Erwin*; his review of A. W. Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*; and his posthumously published lectures on aesthetics.¹⁸⁶ Most important for understanding Hegel's relation to Solger is the review of Schlegel's lectures that was collected in the *Nachgelassene Schriften*. There is no direct evidence that Hegel knew *Erwin*,¹⁸⁷ but in order to fully assess the effect of Solger's understanding of Jena romanticism on Hegel it is necessary to gain a conspectus of Solger's views.

Erwin is the statement of Solger's views in his preferred form of philosophical writing, the dialogue.¹⁸⁸ What impressed Solger, as it did many thinkers following Fichte, was not only the idea that dialogues convey a sense of greater immediacy of thought in virtue of their dramatic form, but also that their conversational nature implicitly cautions against taking the views under discussion as settled at the end of the work. Dialogue can always go on, even if 'off the page'. Solger follows models such as Moses Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* (1767) and especially Schelling's *Bruno* (1802), which adapt the Platonic dialogue for pedagogical use. It is not difficult to recognize in three of the four main characters a philosophical portrait: Bernhard is Fichte, Anselm is Schelling, and Adalbert is Solger himself. The title character is a mediator, politely inquisitive and eager to learn. *Erwin* works through material relevant to Solger's views on romantic irony, but does so indirectly, with irony mentioned by name only at the very end of the

¹⁸⁶ *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, ed. K. W. L. Heyse (Leipzig: 1829). For a consideration of the historical importance of A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures*, see Ernst Behler, 'August Wilhelm Schlegels Vorlesungen über philosophische Kunstlehre, Jena 1798, 1799', in *Evolution des Geistes: Jena um 1800*, ed. F. Strack (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), pp. 412–33.

¹⁸⁷ Hegel mentions in passing in the review of Solger the inclusion of a letter from Tieck to Solger, in which Tieck says that he had not understood Solger's full position until having read *Erwin*. But there is no mention that he, Hegel, has read the work. See HW 11: 235.

¹⁸⁸ Solger's other philosophical dialogues are collected in *Philosophische Gespräche*, ed. W. Henckmann: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972 [original=1817]. For a discussion of the artistic elements in Solger's philosophical writings, see Rudolf Wildbolz, *Der philosophische Dialog als literarisches Kunstwerk. Untersuchungen über Solgers 'Philosophische Dialoge'* (Bern: Haupt, 1952).

work. This closing discussion of irony is memorable for Adalbert's (and thus Solger's) ringing declaration that irony is necessary, and perhaps even sufficient, to a properly artistic view on the world. Adalbert expresses the point in terms that one might ordinarily find in critical writing about painting: the 'spirit of the artist must combine (*zusammenfassen*) all lines (*Richtungen*) in one all-encompassing glimpse (*Blick*); this all-annihilating glimpse that floats above everything, that is what we call irony'.¹⁸⁹ Adalbert does distinguish this irony having to do with a metaphysical artistic perspective from the merely verbal 'apparent irony' (*Scheinironie*) that, he says, one finds in Lucian and 'several of his more recent imitators'.¹⁹⁰ Notwithstanding that, the culminating teaching of *Erwin* would seem to be that the artist must encompass everything at one glance under the aspect of 'annihilation', and do so while floating above the world. On its face, this is a much more radical conception of irony than Schlegel's, unleavened by any countervailing idea of having a stake in the world; it sounds like a renunciation of the world, not merely a distancing from it.¹⁹¹ Needless to say, it hardly would pass muster as a conception of irony that Hegel could embrace.

Erwin was virtually unknown at Solger's death, and it was not until Tieck edited and published the *Nachgelassene Schriften* that Solger won public acclaim from Goethe and Hegel. Solger's review of A. W. Schlegel's lectures is the most important essay in the posthumous collection, and Hegel fixes on it in his assessment of the collection at large. Solger's review elaborates his own claim that irony is the central contemporary aesthetic category and, more importantly from Hegel's point of view, does so in close connection with a stiff critique of the

¹⁸⁹ E 387.

¹⁹⁰ E 388. Given Solger's somber understanding of irony, the choice of Lucian as a target is apt. Lucian was a verbal chameleon, a Hellenophone Syrian who wrote elegant Attic Greek but could so accurately ape Ionic style that some of his work bears uncanny resemblance to Herodotos. No doubt Solger has in mind works like *Symposium*, in which the dinner guests get drunk and tell bawdy jokes and stories, or *The Death of Peregrinus*, where the titular Cynic character tricks generous Christians, lives dissolutely, and in a grand finale self-immolates at the Olympiad. But perhaps the most egregious is *The True Story*, in which Lucian joins a company of adventurers who set out to explore past the Pillars of Herakles, are blown off course and eventually lifted by a tornado up to the Moon, which is embroiled in a war with the Sun. On their return to Earth, a whale that is hundreds of miles long swallows the travelers. Inside it they discover and conquer diverse peoples, finally coming to a sea of milk, in which there is an island of cheese and, beyond it, the Isles of the Blessed. There they meet the heroes of the *Iliad*, and its author Homer, and find Herodotos being punished by the gods for his lies. Odysseus entrusts a letter for Calypso to the adventurers, in which he confesses that he wishes he had stayed with her so he could have lived in eternal bliss. They deliver it to her in due course. Lucian's combination of over-the-top satire and linguistic malleability must have reminded Solger of the Schlegels and, of course, of his friend Tieck.

¹⁹¹ Oskar Walzel, *German Romanticism*, tr. A. E. Lussky (New York: Putnam, 1966), p. 43, asserts that the fourth portion of *Erwin* is 'an elucidation' of Friedrich Schlegel's 'Über die Unverständlichkeit'. Perhaps that is right; in that case Solger seems not to have taken the measure of Schlegel's essay.

competing Schlegelian paradigm.¹⁹² As in *Erwin*, ‘irony’ here refers strictly to the artist’s experience in creating works, not to artworks themselves. But more important to Hegel than this restriction of irony to the subjective experience of the artist is Solger’s account of this ironic experience. Its content is explicitly philosophical and dialectical. The artist’s ironic outlook on the world, which outlook instigates artistic activity, results from her consciousness of an apparent conflict between two ineluctable features of the world as it is given to her reflection. On the one side, the world presents in its particularity as mutable and, relative to the artist’s desire to capture it in a single work, transitory and elusive. On the other side, the artist’s need to depict the world in a particular way leaves her no choice but to create under the assumption that the creative act is powerful enough to influence the world, form it, and thus arrest its transience at least provisionally. These elements combine to give the artist a qualified sense of revelation of ‘the universal’ (the truth of the artist’s comprehension of the world as rendered in art) in the sphere of ‘the particular’ (the contingency of the world so rendered and relative to its rendering). In Solger’s own version of irony, the annihilating power of artistic will is effective but at the same time checked by humility resulting from the realization that, even in art, the artist only captures in a qualified way the richness of existence.¹⁹³ Solger contrasts this ‘objective’ ironic practice with the idea he finds in A. W. Schlegel. The artist’s irony is ‘objective’ for Solger because it consists in the acknowledgement of an imperfect (i.e. an aesthetic, merely symbolic) reconciliation of opposites, not one that can establish real unity with the contingencies of existence. Opposed to this is a merely ‘subjective’ conception of irony that Solger ascribes to A. W. Schlegel and ultimately traces back to an erroneously strict separation in the latter’s aesthetics between comedy and tragedy. For Solger, tragedy is self-consciousness of the power of contingency to overwhelm even exceptionally well-formed individuals who attempt to transcend it heroically. Comedy is also a form of awareness of the relation of universality to particularity, and of the power of contingency over the individual in particular, but one that softens the severity of the effect.¹⁹⁴ In modern literature, the two converge in Shakespeare: the tragedies are quasi-comic and the comedies quasi-tragic. In the great Shakespearean tragedies heroes are highly self-conscious of their own frailty (Lady Macbeth,

¹⁹² Hegel follows Solger in mostly exempting Tieck from the scorn he heaped upon the Schlegel brothers. See HW 11: 234.

¹⁹³ This is a coordinate formulation to the more phenomenological one found in Maurice Boucher, *K. W. F. Solger: Esthétique et philosophie de la présence* (Paris: Delamain et Boutelleau, 1934).

¹⁹⁴ KSNS 1: 566.

Hamlet, Lear) and thus are tragic types with preformed sensitivity to contingency. And in the great comedies there is an undercurrent of death that can interrupt momentarily the humorous exterior of the play (Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch). Put in Solger's dialectical terms, in irony proper annihilation annihilates itself, i.e. irony is reflexive in its application to not only the world viewed by the artist but to the artist herself; for Solger irony undercuts any pretension of the ironist to stand above the fray. Solger holds that the result of this annihilation of annihilation is the realization that there is always a residuum of experience that outstrips the artist's competence. Put otherwise, irony is sublime.

B. Hegel's review of the *Nachgelassene Schriften*

In a remarkable passage in his review of the *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Hegel states that Solger's aesthetic theory anticipates his own dialectical treatment of the nature of art and religion.¹⁹⁵ Here he quotes Solger twice and then offers his gloss and assessment of Solger's views:

'We are for this reason insignificant manifestations, because God has assumed existence in us ourselves and has thereby separated himself from himself. And is this not the highest love—placing himself in nothingness so that we might exist and even sacrificing himself and annihilating his nothingness [*sein Nichts vernichtet*], killing his death, so that we do not remain a mere nothing but return to him and may exist in him?' Then further: 'the nothingness in us is itself the divine insofar as we know it as nothingness and ourselves as the same'. I mark, first of all, that generally the logical Concept that constitutes the foundation for all speculative knowledge is found in this idea—the 'only genuine affirmation' (it is the eternal divine act that is represented) that is comprehended as the *negation of the negation*. Further, one sees this abstract form in its most concrete shape taken in its highest actuality, namely, as the *revelation* of God. Indeed, this is not in the formal, superficial sense of God revealing himself in nature, history, in the fate of the individual human being, etc., but in the absolute sense of the unity of divine and human nature primordially existing in Christ that is brought to human consciousness and, with that, what the nature of God and humanity in truth are.'¹⁹⁶

Hegel here applauds Solger's dialectical treatment of irony, in which there is something like Hegelian contradiction at the basis of the claimed conflict or tension in the ironic artist's worldview.¹⁹⁷ But Solger is not in a position to give a

¹⁹⁵ HW 11: 236–7. ¹⁹⁶ HW 11: 237.

¹⁹⁷ HW 11: 254. Hegel takes the dialog 'Philosophische Gespräche über Seyn, Nichtseyn and Erkennen' (*Nachgelassene Schriften*, II: 200–62) to be the culmination of Solger's anticipation of his own views. It may be that Hegel's 1812 *Wissenschaft der Logik* influenced Solger, but much depends on the dating of the dialog, which is contested. For an overview of the issues, see Wolfhart Henckmann, 'Über Sein, Nichtsein, Erkennen und damit zusammenhängende Probleme der Philosophie K. W. F. Solgers', in *Transzendentalphilosophie und Spekulation. Der Streit um die Gestalt einer ersten Philosophie (1797–1807)*, ed. W. Jaesche (Hamburg: Meiner, 1993), pp. 164–74.

'scientific' account of the 'transition from . . . abstraction to the fullness of content' and this compromises the theory.¹⁹⁸ In turn, this means that Solger cannot give the deepest dialectical assessment of the shortcomings of romantic irony. Because the nature of the compromise is Solger's alleged inability to submit irony to a *complete* dialectical treatment, the tension in irony, as Solger interprets it, is not in fact fully operative contradiction by Hegel's lights, i.e. contradiction that would drive irony to reconcile its two poles. That is, if one were to apply to irony a fully dialectical treatment, one would see in irony an incomplete dialectical circuit. This, in turn, would obviate the need to posit a residuum of the world (an 'in itself' in the Kantian sense) that outstrips reconciliation, as Solger does.

This might seem the end of the matter.¹⁹⁹ Hegel expresses his diagnosis of the strengths and shortcomings of Solger's conception of irony in his own systematic terms.²⁰⁰ Solger's strengths are that he recognizes a properly dialectical structure in irony that tends to reconciliation of subjective mastery of the world with the demands of the world on subjects. The weakness is that Solger is armed with an inadequate structural basis in dialectic to demonstrate that irony *must* seek refuge in intersubjective social structures.²⁰¹ The final expression of Solger's ironic artist is a rueful feeling of humility in face of the world; such expression does not go so far as to conceive of the artist as resolutely facing up to the world, the result Hegel prefers. The only positive philosophical account of irony available to Solger is in point of fact Socratic and tragic, i.e. aimed at attaining ethical truth; yet, he has no account of how this would be instantiated under modern conditions.²⁰² But there is a bit more to Hegel's critique of Solger. It is notable that Hegel passes over in silence Solger's restriction of irony to the purview of art and artists. Clearly Hegel

¹⁹⁸ HW 11: 293–40 n. This is the substance of Hegel's stinging observation that 'it is comical' that Solger himself fails to mention irony at precisely the point of its greatest philosophical relevance, i.e. where it demonstrates the 'identity' of art, religion, and philosophy. See HW 11: 259. For his part, Solger (apparently unbeknownst to Hegel) held 'speculative philosophy' to be fundamentally deficient to the extent that its linguistic mode of expression departs from everyday usage. See Letter from Solger to Tieck, 1.I.1819, in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, I: 702.

¹⁹⁹ See Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik*, 2nd rev. ed. (München: Fink, 1999), pp. 178–80.

²⁰⁰ At HW 11: 233 Hegel writes that 'the most excellent ironical individuality is to be found on our path', with the implication that it is in Hegel's philosophy that irony can truly have its day. This may seem an odd thing for Hegel to say, but he is only making the point that it is in terms of his philosophy that the true significance of irony is best understood.

²⁰¹ Kierkegaard in essence attempts to rehabilitate this 'weakness' as a form of critique of Hegelian metaphysics. His main idea, discussed in chapter three, has its home base in Hegel's understanding of Solger's conception of irony, i.e. that irony is a 'transition' (*Übergang*) (HW 11: 257) between dialectical positions, what Kierkegaard recasts as a *confinium* between 'spheres' or 'life stages'.

²⁰² Hegel introduces two categories of irony relevant to Socrates, i.e. 'limited' (*bestimmte*) and 'tragic' irony (HW 18: 461). The former type reappears in an inverted form and plays a prominent role under the heading of 'mastered irony' in Kierkegaard. See chapter three for a discussion.

has in his sights global claims for irony that reach outside the ambit of art. That this is the case constitutes evidence that Hegel is making a mistake or indulging in creative reconstruction of Schlegel as presented by Solger, a point we shall return to shortly below.

Hegel likely would be brought up short by Solger's position that irony is a necessary (and perhaps sufficient) condition for artistic creation of any merit, a view Solger embraces in *Erwin* and elsewhere.²⁰³ One might perhaps diminish this difference, however, by narrowing Solger's claim to cover what was for him contemporary art of any merit and then arguing that Hegel's lectures on aesthetics seem to present a similar view. It is so much the worse for art *qua* Art, perhaps, that this is the case, but end-stage Romantic Art does seem, in Hegel's estimation, to be locked into progression by its commitment to (and the productive contradictions latent in) irony or humor. Hegel might well agree with Solger that modern irony is at best a Silver Age phenomenon, i.e. that the truest form of irony is that of ancient Greece.²⁰⁴ Moreover, given Hegel's overall positive assessment of Solger, one might think that the category of objective humor in Hegel is just Solger's objective irony under a different name. According to both thinkers, the former is the irony of the romantic hero, bright but insubstantial. What Hegel adds to the picture of this hero—what Hegel believes his own superior appreciation of the dialectic of the governing concepts in the type can deliver—is that the hero ends in dissipation and self-doubt, no longer heroic even by his own lights but more like Turgenev's 'superficial man' (лишний человек).

C. Solger's transmission of the substance of Jena romanticism

Solger plays a crucial role in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Jena romanticism. His review of A. W. Schlegel's lectures, which was a primary source for Hegel's view of Jena romanticism, and Hegel's own review of Solger's *Nachgelassene Schriften* taken together constitute a warren of false claims and accusations.²⁰⁵ In the first instance, A. W. Schlegel is far from claiming that irony is necessary for art, the artist, or the audience. He mentions irony only once in the lectures, in order to contrast it with tragedy, as Solger himself notes.²⁰⁶ Solger is correct that

²⁰³ See KSVÄ 199. ²⁰⁴ See HW 18: 459–61; see also HW 11: 255.

²⁰⁵ Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* and Allemann, *Ironie und Dichtung* also challenge the adequacy of Hegel's interpretation of Friedrich Schlegel on the grounds of undue influence of Solger, but their dismissals of Hegel remain philosophically unproductive, compromised by their failure to investigate whether the mistake might allow us to understand Hegel better than he himself was able.

²⁰⁶ KSNS II: 514.

A. W. Schlegel's slight remarks indicate a rhetorical analysis of irony that has little use for the Socratic or indeed any ethical conception of irony (even a pejorative one, such as one finds in Theophrastus). This substitution of a Latinate model of irony for the Socratic one is the result, for Solger, of the modern divorce of irony from tragedy. But in fact this accounts for why A. W. Schlegel likely finds little harm in a merely rhetorical analysis of irony; irony for him is simply not a central aesthetic concept, never mind an ethical one. This marks a deficiency for Solger only because *he*, Solger, is so intent on irony as a master-concept. It is exceedingly important to mark this: Solger's discussion of irony, while it may have its trigger in reactions to the elder Schlegel, is really *sua sponte*. Solger wants to find more in A. W. Schlegel than Schlegel provides on this issue.

What one is immediately put in mind of, of course, is that the Schlegel with the developed theory of irony is Friedrich, not August. Solger does not discuss Friedrich Schlegel in the review, but given the covert theory of irony he finds behind A. W. Schlegel's aesthetic theory, one might well infer that Solger has smuggled reactions to Friedrich into the review, which in turn gives a strong impression that there is only one thing at issue—the Schlegel brothers' position on irony—instead of two different views. It would have been perfectly understandable that any reader who was familiar with the aesthetic debates of the time interpret Solger to be staking his own ground on the issue of the nature of modern irony *tout court*, i.e. involving the younger Schlegel. This desire to read a fuller theory of irony into source material in turn infects Hegel's review of Solger—this time with Solger's over-motivated account of irony as distorted source material. The final chapter of this story, then, turns to whether the conflation of A. W. and Friedrich Schlegels' different views on irony and the resulting simplification of the younger Schlegel's views in the direction of mere rhetoric infiltrate Hegel's review of Solger and Hegel's final position on romantic irony. There is no doubt that the argumentative highpoints of Hegel's review, as well as Hegel's own reconstruction of the progressive and regressive aspects of Solger's competing conception of irony, involve tacit reflection on Friedrich Schlegel. This is supported by strong indications given by the footnote in section 140 of the *Philosophy of Right* that what Hegel takes to be important about Solger is his negative critique of Jena irony as it is represented in Friedrich Schlegel's writings.²⁰⁷ The suspicion that Solger unintentionally or intentionally

²⁰⁷ Hegel commences the footnote: 'Mein vorstorbener Kollege, Professor *Solger*, hat zwar den vom Herrn Fried. v. *Schlegel* in einer früheren Periode seiner schiffstellerischen Laufbahn aufgebracht und bis zu jener sich selbst als das Höchste wissenden Subjektivität gesteigerten Ausdruck der *Ironie* aufgenommen' (HW 7: 277 n.). On the face of it, this says that Solger took over the expression 'irony', that Friedrich Schlegel made current. One might read this minimally, i.e. as

conflates the two Schlegels increases when one considers Solger's view of romantic irony. As to *scope*, romantic irony for him is global. This is a view that is correctly ascribed to Friedrich but not to August, who hardly mentions the concept in his *Lectures*. As to *substance*, the view that irony is sheer annihilation of given content is August's, not Friedrich's. Moreover, charity demands that one take note of the fact that, as we mentioned, August Schlegel likely thinks this substance benign just because he is not asserting that irony is a global philosophical stance, but rather a concept limited to poetry and rhetoric. The composite of these views yields Solger and Hegel's conception of romantic irony, i.e. as global in *scope* and nihilistic in *substance*.

It is conceptually possible of course that Solger's interest in A. W. Schlegel's 'missing doctrine' of irony did not influence Hegel and that Hegel independently arrived at his account of Schlegel. But the evidence is against it. Influence is likely, given the heavily interactive posture of the texts at issue. If one allows the influence to hold, it is easy to see why Solger's organization of romanticism around the central idea of irony would have been very appealing to Hegel. It would allow Hegel to make irony the focal point of his critique of romanticism—now given an imprimatur by Solger, someone inside the romantic movement—and to take on board a damning characterization of romantic irony: mere rhetoric divorced from the search for ethical truth that 'plays with All'.²⁰⁸ In this vein, Hegel rehearses almost all of his abbreviated criticisms of Friedrich Schlegel in the Solger review: his philosophical views are an aesthetic version of Fichte,²⁰⁹ in which 'Father Irony' assigns to himself the project of 'foiling objectivity' from a 'judging (*urteilend*) stance'. But because any 'solutions' are solutions only relative to him, this 'judging' is incoherent.²¹⁰

In this chapter, we have had to reconstruct Hegel's views on Jena romanticism, and in particular on Schlegel's conception of irony, because those views as they appear in print can be summarily dismissive. The sections on the Beautiful Soul and Evil in the *Phenomenology* and, a bit less so, the treatment in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* of romantic art present detailed portrayals of what Hegel considers romanticism to be. But in the domain of what one surely must count as a main

attributing to Friedrich Schlegel merely writing ironic works. Even if this is the limit of Hegel's mention of Friedrich Schlegel, it is important to notice the acidity in Hegel's remark, for *aufbringen* can also mean 'conjure' or 'summon'. It is possible, however, to read more into the comment. Hegel is here identifying Friedrich Schlegel's conception of irony as the target of Solger, and thus of Hegel himself.

²⁰⁸ HW 18: 460. The charge is directed at Schlegel and Ast.

²⁰⁹ HW 11: 255–6; cf. HW 11: 214. The most famous instance of this charge is in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, see HW 13: 93–4.

²¹⁰ HW 11: 233.

difference between Hegel and Schlegel, i.e. their rival conceptions of dialectic, Hegel's view requires considerable reconstruction. This is because Hegel often writes as if romantic irony is either not dialectical at all or, more moderately, does not conceive of itself as dialectical. We have seen that neither position is tenable, especially from Hegel's own philosophical perspective. We have also seen that it is only by pushing Hegel to specify what it is in irony that is not fully dialectical that one can disentangle these treatments to the extent necessary to properly assess Hegel's critique of romanticism.

What attention to the 'Solger connection' reveals, over and above another possible source of bias in Hegel's treatment of romanticism besides personal animus, is a rough picture of the development in his thought on romanticism and irony. It may not exactly be a compliment to gloss German romantic irony as 'Evil', as Hegel does in the *Phenomenology*, but, be that as it may, that earlier treatment is strikingly sympathetic relative to the later lectures. Might the intervening event have been confusion produced by Solger's review? Might Hegel's view on romanticism have started out as more sympathetic and comprehensive, properly ascribing to irony a dialectical structure, but ended up a caricature of irony as sovereign subjective distance from the world devoid of any dialectical theory? Hegel's earlier treatment of irony accords it the status of a self-aware form of dialectic that fails because it places too much weight on the negative element of the dialectical process—in this case, the idea that the motion of thought is in and of itself a way to submit the world to will and thus a form of freedom. The later work all but retracts this subtlety and instead allows only that irony is pseudo-dialectical. It is as if Evil sought no forgiveness.²¹¹

One may go further. The truth of the matter—perhaps the final irony—is that Solger's *own* position on irony is very close to Friedrich Schlegel's as we reconstructed it in chapter one.²¹² This means that Hegel's allowances for what both he

²¹¹ The change of posture might even be rendered by focusing on two slightly different senses that the German adjective *böse* can have. It can mean 'evil', preserving a sense of the grandeur of what is being accused—that it is a threatening position because one experiences it in majuscule. But *böse* has a less elevated meaning also, as when one yells at a misbehaving child *du böser Junge!* This is perhaps the overriding sense of Hegel's late complaints against irony: *das war aber gar nicht lieb von dir!* That is, the criticism is one-half finger-wagging and one-half an expression of exasperation that one would consider romantic irony to even roughly constitute a theory. So, one might say that Hegel's criticism of romanticism *qua* irony goes from a criticism of 'Evil' to a criticism of 'the Naughty'.

²¹² Hermann Hettner asserted this equivalence long ago (1850), but he gave no substantial argument for it based in a detailed understanding of Schlegel's position. See *Die romantische Schule*, p. 89. Hettner in particular makes the crucial error of maintaining that Friedrich Schlegel's doctrine of irony is merely an aesthetic position, not an ethical one. In other words, he too runs together the two brothers, just to different (i.e. anti-Hegelian) effect. See *Die romantische Schule*, p. 83. Oskar Walzel reaches a similar result. See 'Methode? Ironie bei Friedrich Schlegel und bei Solger,' *Helicon* 1 [1938]: 33–50. Walzel also holds that Hegel's treatment of irony in the 1821 *Philosophie des Rechts*

and Solger consider to be Solger's more dialectically nuanced view of irony are applicable to Schlegel!²¹³ This unacknowledged philosophical kinship between Solger and Schlegel is one of the main points of conceptual continuity between Jena romanticism and Kierkegaard (despite Kierkegaard's views to the contrary). Kierkegaard writes that Solger is 'the metaphysical Knight of the Negative' (*det Negatives metaphysiske Ridder*),²¹⁴ and comes to substitute for this knight another, i.e. the Knight of Faith. But ironic negativity is by no means left entirely to the side in Kierkegaard. Solger and Schlegel abide.

Recapitulation

Scholarship on Hegel at times is hampered by a tendency to pick out one philosophical problem that it is taken to address mainly and then to treat that problem as the guiding thread to follow to attain a synopsis of Hegel's thought as

severs the transmission link through Solger. But, as we have seen, Hegel's treatment here is cursory; it is not until the aesthetics lectures contemporaneous with the Solger review that one has anything like the dismissive, mature, yet *worked-out* view on romantic irony from Hegel.

²¹³ It is going too far, however, to argue that Hegel's speculative philosophy is itself ironic. Cf. Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollections: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985); and Ferdinand Wagnier, *Die romantische und die dialektische Ironie* (Arnsberg: Stahl, 1931). The sole passage that I can identify that one might take as evidence for this view is from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. This is a passage we have already identified as a very negative and rather undistinguished critique of Schlegel. Hegel is contrasting the Socratic and romantic conceptions of irony, and writes:

Es ist auch in neuerer Zeit viel über die Sokratische Ironie gesprochen worden. Das Einfache in derselben ist nur das, daß er das gelten ließ, was ihm geantwortet wurde, wie es unmittelbar vorgestellt, angenommen wird. (Alle Dialektik läßt das gelten, was gelten soll, also ob es gelte, läßt die innere Zerstörung selbst sich daran entwickeln,—*allgemeine Ironie der Welt*.) Man hat aus dieser Ironie etwas ganz anderes machen wollen, sie zum allgemeinen Prinzip erweitert; Friedrich von Schlegel ist es, der diese Gedanken zuerst aufgebracht, Ast hat es nachgesprochen. (HW 18: 460) (emphasis added)

What Hegel is admitting to here is that, from the perspective of the Hegelian philosopher 'on high', the development of *Geist* has at any one of its stations the structure of both established knowledge and the internal 'destruction' of that knowledge. These two aspects are logically linked to produce progression in knowledge. The phrase 'general irony of the world' then simply means that this is the general dialectical structure of human experience as it comes to fruition. Forms of consciousness may not be 'in the know' like the Hegelian philosopher, and one might hold that this tracks the distinction between cognitive insiders and outsiders that is one of the central components to irony. But once the 'full story' is in front of *Geist*, irony becomes merely a way to characterize its own incompleteness. This means that irony is not expressive of any cognitive limitation of the Hegelian system. Again, the attitude is more like objective humor, a form of retrospective regard of one's past acts from a superior perspective, where the past acts are seen as foibles and are subject to tolerance.

²¹⁴ CI 309/SKS 1: 319. Kierkegaard owned Solger's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* and a set of Hegel's writings that included his review of the former work.

a whole. One standard effect of such an approach is that the formal dialectical principles that are supposed to unite a given work receive short shrift, if only because following one thread through the work inevitably makes it difficult to credit Hegel's claims about the necessity and end-directedness of the various transitions between concepts or forms of consciousness, and especially between *sorts* of these: e.g. from 'Consciousness' to 'Self-Consciousness', from 'Reason' to 'Spirit', or from 'Spirit' to 'Religion'. But the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Logic* are not books about one thing; they are books about *everything*, like *De rerum natura* or the *Enneads*.²¹⁵ His expansiveness of course is partly what motivates paring Hegel down to size. Arguments over the 'metaphysical' versus the 'non-metaphysical' Hegel, over whether Hegel's system is closed around teleological principles or not, or over whether Hegel is properly an idealist or not are products of attempting to tame the welter of material. One can judge Hegel's relation to and criticism of Jena romanticism in all of its registers—under the rubric of Conscience, the Beautiful Soul, and Evil in the *Phenomenology*, more formally as a failed form of Hegelian dialectic, as an impermissible incursion of Art into Philosophy—only against the background of one's understanding of the central claims of Hegel's own theory. As do many, Hegel deploys elements of his own system as litmus tests for the adequacy of contending views. But unlike many philosophers for Hegel this test is especially internal and integral to his own theory. This is because Hegel's system requires of itself a comprehensive demonstration that it unfolds stepwise and 'by necessity' out of prior systematic attempts to state the basic structure of the world. Such a demonstration must show that the resources necessary for accounts of rationality (and for reason itself) to develop are internal to these accounts; it is a failure of the 'order of proof' of the *Phenomenology*, for instance, to import the greater resources of the 'standpoint of the philosopher', viewed from the endpoint of the complete Hegelian system, to facilitate development from within forms of consciousness. We have suggested that the near cousin to Hegel's system, Jena romanticism, tests the mettle of that system rather severely. Hegel misinterprets its primary characteristics in a subtle way that betrays an inversion of proof by Hegelian standards and ultimately downplays shared ground.

It is difficult to resist a final fictional characterization of Schlegel and Hegel in their Jena days and after. At one point in his novel *Ferdynurke* Witold Gombrowicz depicts a duel between the Professor of High Analysis and the Professor Dr. of Synthetology, the High Filidor. The first professor's 'method was to decompose a person into parts by means of calculation in general, and by

²¹⁵ See HW 3:24.

filliping noses in particular. He would fillip a nose and thus activate it to a life of its own, whereupon, to the horror of its owner, the nose would move spontaneously in every direction. . . . [He] often practiced his art while riding a streetcar, especially if he was bored.' The doctor of Synthetology, by contrast, 'acted in the pompous spirit of High Synthesis mainly by addition and infinity, and, in emergencies, also with the aid of multiplication + infinity. He was a man of goodly size, quite obese, with a windblown beard and the face of a prophet in spectacles.'²¹⁶ Correct for the obesity, beard, and glasses and one might recognize Hegel in the description of Filidor. Expand one's conception of analysis a bit, and Schlegel might move into view as the Professor of High Analysis, for whom cutting off noses, even his own, gives more pleasure than overarching philosophical argument.

²¹⁶ *Ferdydurke*, tr. D. Borchardt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 87–8.

3

Irony *Redivivus*, or Kierkegaard

The time span of Kierkegaard's philosophical output is by any standards extraordinarily brief—approximately a decade, dating from 1843 to 1854. Even so, it is common to distinguish two periods of what has come to be known as Kierkegaard's 'authorship'. The first of these begins with his first pseudonymous book, *Either—Or* (1843),¹ and extends through to the publication of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1845). Commentators sometimes refer to this period as Kierkegaard's 'aesthetic authorship', which includes both pseudonymous works and works published under his own name. After a hiatus spent writing on matters of Protestant Christian pedagogy Kierkegaard entered a second period of authorship initiated by the so-called '*Corsair* affair'. Upset by a lackluster and poor review of his *Stages on Life's Way* (1845) written by P. L. Møller, Kierkegaard dared the Danish satirical periodical *The Corsair*, to which Møller had contributed, to do its worst. The magazine obliged, heaping ridicule on Kierkegaard's writings, physical appearance, habit of dress, and idiosyncrasies of speech. So public was the humiliation that passersby would accost Kierkegaard on the street in order to re-enact the jibes. This second authorship is often called 'psychological' and reflects a move away from such

¹ The title is a reference to Hegel's use of *Entweder—Oder* to characterize *Verstand* (i.e. an intellectual capacity, as we saw, that depends on sharp distinctions between opposites). See *Enzyklopädie* § 65, HW 8: 155. The typography of the title, 'Enten—Eller', may be significant. The use of the long dash in Danish (*tankestrøg*) is close to that of the *Gedankenstricht* in German, indicating an afterthought. The usual English translation of the title utilizes the forward slash instead of the long dash, i.e. 'Either/Or', but the overall effect of this substitution is difficult to judge. It is tempting to understand the relation of 'either' to 'or' in the title in terms of disjunction understood informally but logically. So, the title may express inclusive disjunction, exclusive disjunction, or antinomy (e.g. contrariety masked as contradiction). Perhaps even the most inclusive specification would be Hegelian dialectic, in which all three are mixed. But this way of looking at the import of the title seems wrong, or at least very incomplete. The effect of the long dash is pragmatic and may be captured in the extended formulation 'either *x* or . . . now that I think of it . . . *y*.' There is no necessary opposition between a thought and an afterthought; they might indeed be compatible. Cf. M. Jaime Ferreira, *Kierkegaard* (New York and London: Blackwell, 2009), p. 38. To incorporate that combination of hesitation and indeterminacy in the title, I shall retain the long dash in the English translation of it.

key doctrines as 'indirect communication', 'spheres of existence', and 'absolute paradox'. Kierkegaard's output during this period, from 1846 to 1854, comprises both pseudonymous publications (e.g. *Sickness unto Death* (1849)) and books brought out under his own name. We shall not be concerned with this later period at all.

Kierkegaard's place in the elaborate development of the concept of irony in and out of German idealism in the first half of the nineteenth century requires a triangulation of his own views with those of Schlegel and Hegel, a schema that Kierkegaard himself imposes on his own consideration of the philosophical significance of the concept.² I want to suggest *both* that Kierkegaard deploys Hegelian critiques of irony and subjective humor against Schlegel *and* that he turns the tables and targets Hegel's conceptions of dialectic and objective humor with roughly Schlegelian resources. To this end, Kierkegaard develops his own conception of irony as a central aspect of his thought by effecting a kind of synthesis between Hegelian humor (but understood in a more 'alienated' mode than is present in Hegel) and Schlegel's conception of irony (but with a reformulated basis for the 'positive' role of irony, i.e. commitment). As we have emphasized in chapters one and two, Schlegel's and Hegel's conceptions of the nature of experience and rationality are dialectical, and so is Kierkegaard's. The doctrine of spheres of existence, along with the ideas of indirect communication and Absolute Paradox, structure Kierkegaard's presentation of dialectical experience and its limits; therefore, cleaving to the scheme of the spheres of existence pays special dividends in situating his thought relative to both Schlegel and Hegel. It is in his presentation of the relation of the spheres to one another and of the means of transition from one sphere to another that Kierkegaard adapts Hegelian dialectical theory and categories in un-Hegelian ways and, at the same time, develops insights based in romantic conceptions of irony.³

² Questions of the proximity of Kierkegaard's thought to Hegel, which works are more and which less Hegelian, what 'Hegelian' might mean for Kierkegaard, and even how much Hegel he had read are vexed. Niels Thulstrup contends that, for the most part, Hegel's thought is alien to Kierkegaard's. See *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. G. L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and *Kierkegaards Verhltnis zu Hegel. Forschungsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969). On this view, the appearance that Kierkegaard deploys Hegelian doctrines is superficial and ironic. Jon Stewart, taking Thulstrup as his target, disputes this view, arguing that there is a good deal of overlap on some views, although very crucial differences as well. See *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). We shall end up siding with the latter view and emphasize at points Kierkegaard's deployment of *and* deformation of Hegelian dialectic.

³ In deploying the term 'transition' to speak of moving from one sphere of existence to a neighboring sphere I do not mean to indicate that the passage from one sphere to another is a continuous, unbroken process. The word 'transition' does strongly suggest continuity, but gradual movement is not analytic to its meaning. The trouble is that most English words that might be used

There are three main works to treat, consideration of which we will supplement with discussion of other texts. The two texts that establish the backbone of Kierkegaard's account of the spheres of existence are *Either—Or*, which primarily deals with the nature of the aesthetic and ethical spheres as well as their relation to one another, and *Fear and Trembling*, which focuses on the nature of the religious sphere relative to the ethical. We shall have reason at times also to advert to *Stages on Life's Way* to bring out some features of *Either—Or* and much more often to *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to fill out the conception of religiosity introduced in *Fear and Trembling* (and anticipated in the intriguing final sections of *Either—Or*). We shall also draw from *The Philosophical Crumbs* to establish elements of Kierkegaard's account of subjectivity.⁴ And because our main interest is in tracing through Kierkegaard the centrality of the idea of irony, thereby bringing at least part of the story of its significance in an important range of nineteenth-century European philosophy to a close, we shall discuss in some detail Kierkegaard's graduate thesis, *The Concept of Irony*. Our view of the centrality of this early text will be controversial: that it continues to inform Kierkegaard's later work and, moreover, that Kierkegaard's appreciation of what are recognizably romantic views on irony becomes more positive in later work. (It is of little consequence that Kierkegaard distances himself later in print from *Irony*: he could be coy or mistaken about its continuing influence on him.) Both romanticism and Hegelianism had substantial presence in Danish philosophy, theology, and literature in Kierkegaard's student years, and he charts his way through these intellectual crosscurrents in a Hegelian fashion. The irony book is written when Kierkegaard is demonstrably more attracted to Hegel than he later would be, and what partly attracts Kierkegaard to Hegel's thought at this time is the sentence that Hegel passes on romanticism. But, as Kierkegaard grows more critical of Hegel, his understanding of the philosophical resources of romanticism is liberated. This does not mean that Kierkegaard performs a *volte-face*, approving of Jena romanticism at

in this context suggest much the same. In what follows, we shall argue that the transition between spheres is importantly discontinuous, so it is crucial here to make this clarification.

⁴ The Danish title that is often translated as 'Philosophical Fragments' is 'Philosophiske Smuler'. A *smule* is a bit or a scrap of something. It can also be used slightly figuratively to mean a 'crumb'. (The boring Danish word for crumb is 'krumme'.) Alasdair Hannay's elegant translation opts for 'crumbs', and I shall follow it. 'Crumbs' connotes that the *smuler* are insignificant leavings, but the best that one can get under the circumstances.

As a general matter, I have chosen to offer parallel citation to the English translations of Kierkegaard by Hong and Hong. Although the Swenson and Swenson/Lowrie translations are sometimes superior in literary value, they are out of print, less comprehensive, and lack the excellent apparatus in the Hong and Hong set. Hannay combines the virtues of philosophical insight and literary sense, but his translations are again less comprehensive in terms of apparatus.

every turn. He is still highly critical of it, but his criticisms have a new depth, won by his detachment from Hegelianism.

Given the complexity of this undertaking, which needs to marshal resources across a wide range of Kierkegaard's writings up to 1846, it is useful at the outset to represent the schematic structure of what follows. One guiding thread of the interpretation of Kierkegaard's conception of the spheres of existence on offer will be what sort of *figures* he presents through his pseudonyms as exemplary of the forms of life lived in various spheres.⁵ The following schema sets out in a thumbnail the breakdown of the spheres and some of the most important exemplars relative to each:

Sphere of existence	Exemplars
I. Aesthetic	
(A) 'Simple' aestheticism	
(1) Sensual	Don Giovanni
(2) Intellectual	Faust, Fichte (?), Schlegel
(B) Irony (<i>confinium I</i>)	Socrates (?), Kierkegaard (?)
II. Ethical	
(A) 'Stolidly' ethical	Kant, Fichte (?), Hegel
(B) Humor (<i>confinium II</i>)	Kierkegaard (?)
III. Religious	
(A) Religiosity 'A'	Knight of Infinite Resignation, Kierkegaard (?)
(B) Religiosity 'B'	Knight of Faith, Abraham

⁵ The literature on Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms is as torturous as the practice itself. I do not wish to take an overall stand on this topic and mention here only aspects that are relevant to understanding the role of irony and humor in Kierkegaard. The first thing to say perhaps is that Kierkegaard does not really use pseudonyms. It has become standard to make a distinction in some high modern literature between the use of pseudonyms and the use of 'heteronyms'. Fernando Pessoa introduces the distinction in connection with his own novels. Writing under a pseudonym is a common literary practice and needn't involve a great deal of fabrication around the person to whom the false name refers. Heteronyms, on the other hand, involve the meticulous invention of whole lives around the 'authors' of their texts—in Pessoa's case even whole books devoted to establishing their lives and backgrounds—crafted with all the care that one would take in creating any fictional character. Anticipating this modernist use, Kierkegaard refers to his practice as one of 'Pseudonymitet eller *Polyonymitet*' (CUP 626/SKS 7: 569) (emphasis supplied). Although Kierkegaard does not go to the extremes of a Pessoa, he goes well beyond simple pseudonyms. This general point helps to bring into relief the main purpose of nested heteronyms or pseudonyms for Kierkegaard, i.e. to deflect authorial stability, especially where there are indications that some of the pseudonyms are fungible, as is consistent with the culmination of the aesthetic sphere. If the ordinary sense of 'being an author' includes 'having authority over' or 'being a unique and stable point of departure for interpreting the work', then a pseudonym, to the extent that it deflects authorship, disowns this responsibility and expresses the aesthetic point of view. The point is not necessarily to question the very idea of authority; rather, it is to make clear and to raise the bar on what will count as 'owning' a communicated content.

Spheres of Existence I: The Aesthetic

Kierkegaard differentiates three spheres of existence, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, the first two of which are the subject matter of *Either—Or*.⁶ This tripartite structure is already vaguely Hegelian. The spheres are each subdivided into discrete ‘moments’, which are stages that one must pass through in order to transition from one sphere to another. We shall assume that Kierkegaard holds that the sequence of these transitions is necessarily cumulative (i.e. that one cannot pass over a stage and still transition between spheres) and progressive (i.e. that each subdivision within a sphere or each sphere itself is superior in some way to its predecessor). Moreover, transitions between subdivisions, as well as those between spheres of existence, necessarily involve something akin to the immanent dialectical development via internal criticism that we saw at work in Hegel (and, in a different form, in Schlegel). Of course Kierkegaard is not flatfootedly and earnestly adapting this Hegelian paradigm; he structures his thought in this way to issue his own critique, internal in a way, of Hegel, much as Plato bends pre-existing dramatic forms to wage guerilla warfare on rhetoric and tragedy. Of particular interest is Kierkegaard’s modification of Hegel’s conception of dialectical movement, here as transition between spheres, where Kierkegaard is formally at his most un-Hegelian. But the strategy of adapting the doctrines of other philosophers critically, even where that criticism is directed back at the source for the adaptation, by itself provides no reason to discount the doctrine of the three spheres as merely playful.⁷ There is a certain methodological irony at play here (more of this later), but Kierkegaard would agree with Schlegel that this does not indicate absence of commitment to the structure. Kierkegaard certainly means the reader to see this and holds that adopting this Hegelian framework affords him a powerful way to criticize Hegel by turning Hegelian dialectic away from its ‘scientific’ bearing.

⁶ See CUP 501–2/SKS 7: 455; see also SLW 476/SKS 6: 439. We shall speak of spheres of existence in connection with my interpretation of *Either—Or*, even though the doctrine is not stated there by name. There is ample justification for this practice in *Either—Or* itself and in the conceptual and historical proximity of that text to others that do deploy the schema explicitly.

⁷ This is true notwithstanding Kierkegaard’s avowedly anti-systematic bent. It is too easy by far just to write off Kierkegaard’s statements to this effect as blanket claims that systematic philosophy *tout court* is on the wrong track. We saw a similar danger in understanding some of Schlegel’s claims in chapter one. When, for instance, Kierkegaard says that one of the positive effects of irony is to undercut systematic philosophy, what he has in mind is ‘the system’ of Hegel or conceptions of systematicity in philosophy that closely resemble it, not systematic philosophy under any description. In its way, as I hope to make plain in what follows, Kierkegaard’s thought is highly systematic.

A is the pseudonymous author of Part I of *Either—Or*, whose papers comprise a series of representations from within of the aesthetic worldview. It is possible to divide the aesthetic sphere into two main stages, ‘simple’ and ‘intellectual’ aestheticism. Kierkegaard presents one principal literary case study devoted to each: for the former, Da Ponte and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and, for the latter, Goethe’s *Faust*.⁸ Kierkegaard also investigates less well-known figures from literature and invents a number of protagonists who are exemplary of different degrees of intellectual aestheticism. Perhaps the most embracing definition of the aesthetic worldview is contained in Kierkegaard’s statement that ‘the aesthetic in a person is what makes him *immediately* what he is’.⁹ For the simple aesthete this immediacy consists in something like pure, unreflective *sensuous* experience and a self-understanding based in one’s stake in having such experience. Because sensuous experience is private and varies greatly from person to person, the simple or sensuous aesthete’s immediacy is hers alone, and this uniqueness is constitutive of her being the person she is.

‘Immediacy’ is used in a variety of ways in philosophical contexts, and the categorization of the sensuous aesthete as immediate here is a peculiar epistemic use. One sometimes speaks of immediacy as the state in which one is in direct, i.e. *conceptually unmediated* contact with the world. It is a hallmark of the historical period under consideration to use the term in this way: this is the main sense in which Jacobi is hailed or criticized as a philosopher of immediacy. A related sense of ‘immediacy’ invokes *non-inferential* thought. Immediate thought or experience in this sense might indeed be discursive, but its being thought or experienced would not require linkage with any other thought or experience. Taking any of these senses of ‘immediacy’ to be exclusive or primary can seem to rule out the category of ‘intellectual’ aestheticism: if what is ‘aesthetic’ within one is immediately given to one, and if what is immediate is non-discursive, then, so long as intellect involves discursivity, the phrase ‘intellectual aesthete’ would seem to involve a contradiction. But Kierkegaard does hold intellectual aestheticism essentially to involve discursivity, so, on pain of this contradiction, ‘immediate’ must have a broader extension for him than that provided by the standard epistemic family of uses.¹⁰ ‘Immediate’ for him, even in the context of

⁸ Kierkegaard attended a performance of the Mozart opera in 1835, and it made a significant impression on him. See Alasdair Hannay *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 61 (also citing a journal entry foreshadowing the later philosophical significance for Kierkegaard). See SKPJ 104/*Papirer* II A 491 [1839].

⁹ E—O 2: 178/SKS 3: 173–4 (translation modified and emphasis supplied).

¹⁰ This is the import of Kierkegaard’s assertion that the anti-hero, Julius, of Schlegel’s *Lucinde* is no *Don Juan*. *Lucinde* is not in Kierkegaard’s estimation ‘musical’ and, accordingly, cannot capture the right sort of immediacy (CI 293/SKS X: 327). Julius is, in other words, a reflective or intellectual aesthete.

simple aestheticism, cannot simply mean ‘non-discursive’ or token a complete lack of ‘reflection’. He thus uses the term in a wider sense, to denote *absorption in* subjective self-sufficiency: in the self-sufficiency of pleasure in the simple aesthetic case and, in the intellectual case, in the self-sufficiency of thought.

A. *Don Giovanni and simple aestheticism*

The title character of Da Ponte and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is exemplary of this most primitive form of aestheticism, rigorously and relentlessly pursuing the sensual pleasure paradigmatic of unreflective immediacy. A also writes that music, and particularly Mozart’s music in the opera, is the perfect medium—really the only medium—in which one might present the life of such a person. It is crucial to Kierkegaard that A experience Don Giovanni’s form of life musically—by listening to and thereby imagining himself into the opera.¹¹ Of course, one might think that erotic pleasure—the main sort of sensuous pleasure that concerns Don Giovanni—in fact is not quite so simple, that it is often impinged upon or even formed by various self-understandings, second-order desires, or social conventions. No one can read Sade without being impressed by the extraordinarily broad and prepared, if perverse, canvas upon which erotic desire is painted. And the idea that music is inherently erotic is close to cliché. But Kierkegaard need not deny that music is a social object, nor does he wish to trade in truisms. Don Giovanni’s mode of life, and the idea that this mode of life is musical or can only be understood by listening to (Mozart’s) music, is an *ideal construct* that Kierkegaard employs to gauge the probity of A’s own intellectual aesthetic interpretation of the idea of pure, sensuous aestheticism. Pure aestheticism is, to speak loosely, a kind of thing-in-itself, for A and for Kierkegaard.

In A’s view, Don Giovanni understands his conquests as fungible and impersonal. Indeed one of the signature aspects of the Don Giovanni scenario is that the conquests are present as both immediate *and* abstract, which cuts against the grain of many philosophical treatments of abstractness that connect it closely with achieving reflective distance. Don Giovanni treats his sexual conquests as mere markers of his own erotic power, but not by reflecting on those conquests; abstraction is rather for him a mode of primary agency, a kind of perception. If one takes this basic aspect of the character sufficiently seriously, it becomes unclear whether Don Giovanni truly qualifies as a ‘seducer’, a point taken for granted by almost everyone who writes on Kierkegaard’s consideration of the

¹¹ This betrays a certain thesis about the relative priority of music to libretto in opera on Kierkegaard’s part, which is part of a series of reflections in philosophy, musicology, and musical historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The questions are too complex to go into here.

opera.¹² His level of reflection on his actions, his investment in his planning of assignments (delegated to minions), and his retrospective relish in the completed task is low, not Casanova-like in the least. The ‘Seducer’s Diary’, which ends the section on the aesthetic sphere is a much more labored, self-reflective article. (Would Don Giovanni ever pause to even *think* of writing down his exploits? This seems unlikely.) Nonetheless, using the term ‘seduction’ does not seem *too* misleading. His assignments are significant not because each time Don Giovanni is discovering anew a different person, with whom shared intimacy broadens his experience because he has added to it the experience of the lover’s individuality. Rather, sexual conquest sustains him and his self-understanding, to the extent that it can, because through it he exercises his power to move from love to love; this movement in and of itself enhances his feeling of independence through the domination of others. He is a purely kinetic lover, treating others as means alone, mere triggers for the exercise of his erotic power.

Kierkegaard’s choice of the comic depiction in *Don Giovanni* over the many other representations of Don Juan at his disposal (e.g. that of Byron), which also present the character as a rake, is significant.¹³ This is no doubt due to the musical depiction of character, for Kierkegaard holds that there is a strong analogy between music as an abstract art and the abstracting nature of Don Giovanni’s sensual life—a life that organizes itself around the impossible project of living according to something approaching a principle of pure, flowing sensuality.¹⁴ Indeed, he treats the descriptions ‘immediately erotic’ and ‘musically erotic’ as synonymous. The category of ‘the sexual’ assumes a metaphysical status in the opera,¹⁵ not so much as an ideal that the Don himself strives to approximate in his many lovers, but rather as the erotic instantiation of the interaction in life of creation and destruction (viz. sexual union and violent romantic overthrow). Such forces, so very closely joined to one another that they might seem to be two sides of the same coin, are indifferent as to what they act upon. An example of just this kind of attitude perched on the wire of fecundity *cum* degeneration is the duet exchange occasioned by Leporello’s

¹² See, for instance, Bernard Williams, *On Opera* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 31–4.

¹³ Kierkegaard discusses the choice, and specifically Byron’s and Molière’s characterizations at E—O 1: 103–15/SKS 2: 108–18. John Berger’s novel *G*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972) also takes the Mozart/Da Ponte version as its starting point. Berger’s hero is hardly demonic; he discovers political commitment in virtue of his romantic wanderings.

¹⁴ One of the main results of the depiction of the various forms of the aesthete in A’s papers, as those papers are understood by B, the judge, is that the aesthete cannot really live according to a principle—indeed, that is what he wants above all else not to do.

¹⁵ As Louis Mackey succinctly puts it: ‘sex *an sich*’. See *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 5.

anxiety at the dead Commendatore's letter and Giovanni's reaction to it. When the distraught Leporello confesses, in an aside, 'Io sentomi gelar!' at the prospect of dinner with the author of the letter, Giovanni responds indirectly in an aside of his own as the pure aesthete par excellence: 'Che gusto! Che spassetto!'¹⁶ But not even this sort of thing can be a principle for Don Giovanni, if by 'principle' one understands not just a source for power, but rather a standard against which one's reasons can be measured. Anything that is to be even so much as a candidate for such a principle requires reflection on action, something that Don Giovanni all but lacks as A understands him. He is 'ideal' in this utter lack.¹⁷ This leads to the main teaching of the case study of Don Giovanni: life must give way to *art* in order that such a principle might emerge from within Don Giovanni's form of life. Art, often taken to be the epitome of immersion in pleasure and desire, in fact requires action at a remove, no matter how intuitive one makes the artistic process out to be. Art requires taking something in hand and making over the world in its terms. Kierkegaard subscribes to at least this much romanticism: art is an activity that, while it may come close to the immersion in the world ideally sought by Don Giovanni, nonetheless stands back from the world, allowing the reflection necessary for creation via finite agency. Once one takes this point, one has moved on from the world of the pure aesthete.

Placing emphasis on a transition from the ideal of the 'purely natural man' wholly embedded in his sensuality to the requirement that art represent this type *to* the aesthete brings us more squarely before A. A is an aesthete whose attempt to make internally coherent a purely sensuous life has brought him to explicitly recognize something he knew all along—or at least knew well enough to write it down. What he knows is that he, even as an aesthete, cannot help but reflect on what it is to be an aesthete. If Don Giovanni is the exemplary sexual savant, the being whose sexual existence is completely isomorphic with 'the natural', A cannot *be* Don Giovanni. At best the Don is exemplary in only the most abstract sense, which raises the question of what sort of example an aesthete—here, A—*could* take as an example. For the very idea of taking an example or being one is now cast in doubt. Giovanni is presented explicitly as a type that is, for A at least, impenetrable. Any intellectual aesthete must use her imagination in treating anything as exemplary, for she must always ask: how would it to be for me to experience the world in that way? As in Hegelian dialectic, A resolves this problem, which is insoluble at the level of the sensuous aesthete, by moving just beyond that way of life to a perspective from which he can look on sensuous

¹⁶ *Don Giovanni*, II.xii (Duet No. 24).

¹⁷ E—O 1: 106/SKS 2: 109–10.

immediacy as a principle—i.e. he moves beyond it just enough to dispel the contradiction between the *principle* of sensuous, non-reflective immediacy and the attempt to *live* according to it *as* a principle. In actuality the category of sensuous immediacy was never stable; it never provided the basis for an actual, concrete form of life. Rather, it is an idea of sensuality that A can value *because it can be reflected upon*. A cannot be natural; therefore, he must be artful. He takes on the task of living life as a form of art, and does this by making art by writing down his reflections in a way that expresses this view of life. Still, he finds the example of Don Giovanni irresistible; it is erotic *for him*. But it is so, I would suggest, precisely because of the imaginative effort necessary on his part to pose Don Giovanni as an example. The erotic pull of the example engages reflection in this way as well.

B. The many faces of the reflective aesthete

The attention scholarship often lavishes on Kierkegaard's portrayal of Don Giovanni can obscure the equal importance of his treatment of Faust in *Either—Or* and elsewhere as a paradigmatic aesthete of the mind for understanding his views on the nature of the aesthetic sphere. In order to make as clear as possible the conceptual structure that we take to control Kierkegaard's discussion of the reflective aesthete, we shall take some of the source material for interpretation out of textual order and combine it with discussion of works other than *Either—Or*. We aim thereby to offer a synoptic account that balances adequate consideration of the textual complexities of Kierkegaard's presentation of the various faces of the reflective aesthete with the conceptual distance necessary to reconstruct Kierkegaard's account and do justice to its philosophical force.

Faust's seduction of Margarete marks his case as transitional between that of Don Giovanni and the even more intellectualized forms of aestheticism present in the later sections of A's writings. Both Don Giovanni and Faust have erotic domination as their primary aims, but the centrality of the figure of Margarete for Kierkegaard alerts the reader that Faust's aestheticism is not Giovanni's exemplary yet strictly impossible unfettered sensuality. Don Giovanni is a feral innocent, for whom the category of the ethical can have neither meaning nor impact. The progression from immediate erotic aestheticism to aestheticism expressed artistically, which expression culminates in the art of A's papers and the 'editing' of them by Victor, is a development of Don Giovanni's status as an example both for A and for the readers of A's papers. It tokens a change from being an example held up as a possible way to live to an example of how it might ideally *appear* that it might be lived, but which reflection nevertheless reveals as an impossible form of life. There is no progression *within* the character of Don

Giovanni; he makes no such discovery about himself. He is dragged down, unrepentant and laughing, to Hell; it is just another adventure to him. The case of Faust is a different matter. Kierkegaard allows that he is a 'reproduction' of Giovanni, but insists nevertheless upon crucial differences between the two figures.¹⁸ Faust is a 'reproduction' because he is another exemplar, both for A and for the reader, of the aesthetic life—but this time as the expression of the rampant, searching intellectual desire for what is novel and as yet uncharted. As it will turn out, Faust's intellectual form of wantonness cannot help but hone itself against the stone of *ethical* immediacy in the transition to the next sphere. This is why Margarete is more central to Kierkegaard's analysis than are any of Don Giovanni's conquests (even Donna Elvira). To be sure Margarete is an *object* for Faust that (whom?!) he deeply wants to possess, but she anticipates the ethical in her simple love, a form of desire requiring mutuality of spirit that surpasses Faust's capacities to both ignore and accommodate it. But Faust *can* know that it is elusive, by recognizing that her love is genuine and simple. The point is not that Margarete resists his advances out of ethical motives, or even that she is in a position to resist them at all. Kierkegaard admits that one is quite right to think that Donna Elvira shows more spine than does Margarete; she is after all Don Giovanni's reflective superior. But Faust can 'use up' Margarete in a way that Giovanni cannot use Elvira just because Margarete is an innocent, both intellectually and hedonistically. Indeed, this *simplicity* of love is what Faust desires most to possess, and it is the fulcrum for their interaction and for the role of the example of Faust for A. When Faust is done with Margarete, he does not replace her simplicity with something of greater complexity. He does not educate her, nor does he enhance her prospects for what he takes to be freedom, for this would ruin the simplicity that drew him to her in the first place. Her value for him rests entirely in being an empty receptacle for his tuition; her lure is that she is utterly impressionable.¹⁹ Instead, he leaves her with nothing. Because Kierkegaard deploys the concept of love (i.e. marital love, under a certain understanding of it) in B's papers to track 'the ethical', one may interpret Faust's attraction to Margarete's erotic simplicity as a response to the pull of the ethical as it would first manifest itself in aesthetic desire. It is immediacy that outstrips Faust's reflection, another indication that immediacy will have to mean something quite different to Faust and to A than mere lack of reflection. Don Giovanni's case, thought through rigorously as a case of the aesthetic, would be as unimaginable to Faust as it is to A.

¹⁸ E—O 1: 205/SKS 2: 201.

¹⁹ E—O 1: 208–14/SKS 2: 205–9.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Faust myth is non-standard, as he reminds the reader.²⁰ Its main progenitor is Goethe's poem, but Kierkegaard considers Goethe an adversary as well, holding that Goethe pigeonholes Faust as a prideful intellectual wanton whose thirst for experience at the expense of love and wisdom runs roughshod over the innocents in the legend. Marlowe's play, although it shows Faust as less heroic and more a pure sensualist than does Goethe, shares this view.²¹ Kierkegaard does not reject the characterization of Faust as an intellectual vagrant (or voyager)—as he puts it, of Faust as the 'doubter *κατ' ἐξοχήν*'²²—but he adds a corollary to the formula.²³ Faust may be a skeptic, but he harbors within himself the knowledge that this is a tragic characteristic. Viewed from the outside, Faust often seems to act with an eye toward convention while privately harboring quite unconventional thoughts. But he is not actually trying to deceive; Faust sincerely feels the pull of 'the universal' in responding to such conventions. Faust's tragedy (and here Kierkegaard departs from Goethe) is that he is riven between two elemental forces: ethical convention, where the 'universal' is in force, and his own internal, skeptically driven intellectual passion. The latter is so self-consuming that what can count as a true exercise of intellect is always brokered by his eternal watchfulness, by the fear that something has been missed, that a premise is lacking, or that background conditions have not been adequately taken into account. Far from the 'unshakability' that the Pyrrhonists supposed would follow from the ability to say either 'yes' or 'no' to any proposition, Faust feels continually torn between the demands of his heart and those of this skeptical principle. This in turn forms the basis for Kierkegaard's claim that what is missing from standard interpretations of the Faust myth is his 'sympathetic nature', which resides in his doubt having 'secret conversations with itself'

²⁰ See E—O 1: 207–8/SKS 2: 205–6; FT 108–9/SKS 4: 197–9.

²¹ Marlowe does not present Faust's insatiable appetite for knowledge as evil per se, but it is a point of great moral vulnerability. It is also worth noting that Marlowe's doctor trades his soul for magical powers and theoretical knowledge, whereas Goethe's bargains for experience at fever pitch. The bet is due when he is *contented* with life or, to put it in Schlegel's vernacular, when he is *bored*. As Nicholas Boyle points out, yet another main change in attitude from Marlowe to Goethe is captured well by the shift from a pact with Mephistopheles to a wager. The former business transacted, so to speak, on the Devil's own turf, with the hero's Christian soul assumed by both parties to be in play. The latter is an assertion of humanity and is revolutionarily non-Christian. In a way Goethe's Faust is the reverse of Milton's Satan: a revolutionary as to a failed revolutionary. See Nicholas Boyle, "Wagering on Modernity: Goethe's Eighteenth-Century Faust," *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* [2009] 7: 217–34. That said, Marlowe is undoubtedly Goethe's main source. Translations of Marlowe's play into German abounded, and Marlowe's treatment all but controlled the transmission of the material.

²² FT 108/SKS 4: 196.

²³ Cf. the reference in the footnote preceding this passage to the ironist as a 'substitute' for Faust. FT 107–8 n./SKS 4: 196–7 n.

(*hemmelige Samtaler med sig selv*).²⁴ Kierkegaard's choice of phrase here is beguiling, for it is unclear whether he is ascribing a sympathetic nature to Faust himself or to our proper reaction to him. But the answer must be: to both. Faust is a proper object of our sympathy because he has sympathy as one of his characteristics, if but in a deficient way. He does not cold-heartedly and without guilt bed the virgin Margarete. He feels the demand of the universal in love and sorrowfully cannot balance that against the contrary desire to possess her as one possesses a piece of eroticized knowledge.

Faust's desire is knowledge, but his form of life does not consist merely in an accumulation of facts or discoveries. Instead it comprises the constant, unceasing activity of exercising his power of moving from one object of reflection to the next. There might of course be some ordering of that knowledge, and thus some local constraints on the way one would have to pass between such states of knowledge. But in general such passage is due to the sheer impetus of movement between what is already known (and thus, relative to the impetus, 'used up') and the next, new exercise of the power of reflection. The character of Faust sounds a theme central to Kierkegaard's thought: that reflection is unavoidably human, and that it thus carries with it grave dangers of overestimating its power. The danger is insidious, for the structure of reflection in itself—its capacity to bend back on itself and 'thicken' or 'nest' its power through its reflexivity—can convince reflective agents that it, reflection, is definitive of finite agency to the exclusion of all else. The transition from Don Giovanni to Faust, as we have set it out, operates on two levels pertinent to this theme. On the first of these, the transition is from an unreflective sort of immediacy to a reflective one. On the second, it is a development of the idea of exemplarity within the aesthetic for the aesthete, one that offers differing versions of being aesthetic. As we said, Don Giovanni is for A *qua* aesthete emblematic of the draw of the idea of total absorption in desire, a conception that A knows to be impossible in actuality. It is only an abstract thought-content, and that is precisely its draw for the aesthete, who would like to do his trade only in non-discharged *possibilia*. A similar bifurcate structure between two such levels is present in the transition from the figure of Faust to subsequent scenarios presented in A's papers. On one level, the papers present this as an intensification of reflection itself in the fashion we have just emphasized: reflective power increases through self-application of that power. The later sections of A's papers up to and including 'Diary of the Seducer'

²⁴ FT 108/SKS 4: 196; see also E—O 3/SKS 2: 11. Danish dropped initial capitalization of common nouns in the orthography reform of 1948. Kierkegaard capitalizes all nouns, and I shall follow that practice in citation from his Danish.

compound reflection in just this way. On another level, however, the development concerns how and what the aesthete can imagine by way of these scenarios in order to understand his mode of life. As the scenarios advance in terms of the complexity of the reflective concatenations they portray, they come closer to A's own understanding of the potential of being aesthetic. In his papers A exhibits his self-understanding in the only way he can as an aesthete: by projecting himself imaginatively into a form of life that coalesces around a fiction. The basic question, then, is: *are* there any true aesthetic exemplars? Can fictions play this role at all and, if they can, what is the cost of them doing so?

Another consequence for Faust of treating the objects of thought as radically fungible—to him each object is ‘the same’ as any other in that it functions merely as an ‘occasion’ (*Lejlighed*) for thought—is boredom.²⁵ Put in terms that Kierkegaard holds Schlegel introduces in his *Athenäum* fragments and that A gladly would adopt, boredom is a grave form of life in which a very considered attitude that *nothing is interesting* is intimately related to a general orientation where *everything is barely interesting*. Kierkegaard considers boredom a component of despair and uses despair and the consciousness of despair in the aesthete as indicia (among others) of progression within the aesthetic sphere. The lack of interest that the aesthete's imagination breeds is but the obverse of a coin on the face of which is stamped the credo that nothing is more or less interesting than anything else. The monotony of the aesthete arises from acting noncommittally in an attempt to keep the category of action firmly anchored in mere possibility.²⁶ Take any action A. The aesthete seeks to preserve her freedom by understanding A such that her doing A does not make A definitive of her. ‘Definitive’ might be too strong a word; very few actions define one. So, perhaps a better formulation is that the aesthete will best preserve her freedom, as she understands it, to the extent that her commitments to A are as minimal as possible while still consistent with the bare idea of ‘doing A’. The formulation is by no means crystal clear, but it is serviceable for making

²⁵ E—O 1: 233–47/SKS 2: 227–40. ‘Occasion’ is a term of art for Kierkegaard: it is a contingent, if not accidental, prompt, the occurrence of which is outside the causal power of the agent prompted. Moreover, the Danish connotes, as can the English, a *special* event that can conjure many thoughts, memories, etc. (e.g. ‘the opening of his exhibit was an occasion for all’). The idea is that the peculiar form of synthesis pertinent to the aesthete begins in an occasion, although something's being a prompt requires the preexistence of imaginative material ready to be prompted. An occasion is always subsidiary to the synthesis that it initiates, which synthesis can overwrite, in effect, the content of the prompt.

²⁶ Kierkegaard does not forward the idea prominent in later French philosophy that boredom (*ennui*) is *by itself* a form of despair. It is rather that boredom involving ‘the same’ brings to the surface a submerged desire for something different.

the following point. To do *A* one must commit oneself, if only in the broadest terms and indefinitely, to whatever foreseeable consequences obtain on the doing of *A*; the world cannot be Balkanized into anything remotely like atomic actions, the doings of which have no meaningful consequences. But that is not all: any action *A* also rules out potential other future actions inconsistent with the doing of *A*, so that *A* can entail some not-*B*. The aesthete ultimately is driven to recognize this: that doing any action forecloses ‘possibility’, the cherished home of aesthetic freedom. This is one meaning of the ‘either—or’ of the title of the book. One must do *either* this *or* that, where the ‘or’ is exclusive, i.e. either *A* or *B*, but not both. What the aesthete would like to be able to respond, if this either—or were issued as a command, would be: ‘neither—nor’. But that is strictly impossible. The aesthetic reaction to this impossibility is regret. One might take the regret to pertain to the impossibility of ‘doing nothing’ under this specification—i.e. not being able to suspend once and for all the inherent directedness of action. This is correct, but it is not regret at its deepest. This more superficial regret masks a deeper type that is evidence of a failed *commitment* to an inadequate principle of freedom. One might take the point further and insist that regretting something requires having done it with requisite care and yet to have failed, either failed to do enough or failed in the doing. In any case, the aesthete is caught on the horns of a dilemma: one must do, yet what one does is ‘nothing’ to one.

It is the theme of deepening despair that unifies the portion of *A*’s papers addressed to the *symparanekromenoi*, the ‘fellowship of the defunct’ (of which it is not clear from the text whether *A* is a member). We have already discussed the Faust and Margarete treatment contained therein. The three parts of this section of the book also are ordered in terms of degrees of reflective immediacy from lesser to greater, from the relatively unthinking tragic pain of *Antigone*, through the Faust and Margarete story, to the unhappiness of memorial reflection. The section does for sorrow and *thanatos* what the prior sections of *A*’s papers do for pleasure and *erōs*.

The first installment, ‘The Tragic in Ancient Drama, Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama’, takes as its central concern the nature of tragic mistake (*ἁμαρτία*). As to ancient tragedy, Kierkegaard by and large adopts Hegel’s analysis of *Antigone*: what the hero suffers is based in components of her world that are in conflict that could not fully be in her control even if she were to exercise the greatest care. If blameworthiness presupposes the capacity to do otherwise, as seems reasonable, she cannot be blamed. Indeed one ought not blame her *or Kreon* for the tragic state of affairs. The result is due to the clash of irreconcilable ethical orders. The native effect of ancient tragedy is sorrow (*Sorg*): a resigned awareness of not having been able to do otherwise and, yet,

having to acknowledge the act as one's own.²⁷ Modern tragic drama, by contrast, does concern moral blame and, therefore, is judgmental by its nature and does not require identification on the part of the audience with the tragic hero.²⁸ The point of this consideration of tragedy embedded in A's papers is that immediate sorrow, like immediate pleasure of the absolutely musically erotic, is not available to A. It is at best an ideal state that depends for its existence on a lack of reflective resolution of the structural parts in a contradiction.

The second essay presented to the gathering is 'Shadowgraphs' or 'Silhouettes' (*Skyggerids*). It is preceded by an introduction, whose main purpose is to revisit the debate over Lessing's interpretation *contra* Winckelmann of the Laokoön statue group. Lessing holds Winckelmann's interpretation of the statue group, which ascribes to the title figure a facial expression of heroic control under conditions of extreme pain, implausible because it does not take into consideration the inherent representational limitations of statues (and more generally of any visual art of that time). Lessing's argument is that pictorial art cannot determinately render temporal duration of an action depicted. Where the type of action—or an inference from a depiction to such a type—requires disambiguating two or more temporal possibilities, it is not possible to make a definitive ascription to a work of a meaning. At issue is the opening of the title figure's mouth. Winckelmann interprets it as a controlled gesture, mastery of the impulse to scream. Lessing argues that this is because Winckelmann operates with the background assumption that the depiction is the present resolution that began in the past; in the past, there was the impulse to scream, now that impulse has been nobly mastered. But, Lessing argues, statues are not kinetic and cannot support such temporal inferences. They can only represent under the aspect of the present, or better yet, can only be spatial. As the sculpture group according to Lessing can only offer a moment, and therefore perhaps but a transitory glance at something deeper that must remain hidden by virtue of the very medium in question, so too the cameos presented in the three essays have this profile—they are only revealed, to the extent that they are revealed at all, against a background. The 'Shadowgraphs' deploy female figures in drama to backlight their central themes relative to the connection of sorrow with reflection. The character of Marie Beaumarchais in Goethe's *Clavigo*, sorrowful over her broken engagement, is

²⁷ E—O 1: 150–1, 155–6/SKS 2: 149–50. Kierkegaard first refers to Sophokles' Theban trilogy, but the key tragedy for him in this regard is clearly *Philoktetes*.

²⁸ E—O 1: 148/SKS 2: 146.

exemplary of a kind of deception (*Bedrag*).²⁹ The author of 'Shadowgraphs' assumes that deception cannot be a basis for any 'true love'. Either one is in love and is thus not deceived at all, or one is deceived and there was never any love in the first place. Why, then, be sorrowful over the broken engagement, if it was broken by an underlying deception—if there was no love in the first place? This is where reflection attaches; to be sorrowful or not requires understanding the connection between deception and love, which deception, of course, is itself a ratiocinative product. Next Donna Elvira, the nun whom Don Giovanni seduces, takes a curtain call. Don Giovanni does not deceive her—he cannot, because he lacks reflection and does not make out that he understands or wants to understand her. What causes sorrow then? Without promises there cannot be even so much as sham reciprocity or the false expectation of love; so, Donna Elvira was not 'left behind' since she was never 'there' for him in the first place. She compensates for this emptiness reflectively; she is left with a nullity where a rational basis for vendetta would otherwise be. Her sorrow is hatred and revenge born of reflective transposition, and her form of despair is constant fluctuation between remembering herself as loved, and therefore as left behind, and sheer, free-floating hatred. The third cameo is *Faust's* Margarete, which we have already treated. To repeat: Faust desires Margarete in her simplicity, but his desiring her makes her more complicated and reflective *for him*. In her simplicity she is both what he cannot attain through reflection and, thereby, an escape from himself and his existence as an intellectual aesthete. Faust's desire reveals to him, as is not the case for Clavigo and Don Giovanni, what he has lost in mistaking the totality of finitude for infinity.

The final essay is a talk given to the group, 'The Unhappiest One', a more or less direct reference to the final unit on 'The Unhappy Consciousness' in the chapter on 'Self-Consciousness' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. The club's main purpose is to reflect on death or its variants (sleep, sleepwalking, daydreaming, etc.) and to determine what is most desirable. In addressing his confrères the speaker equates the greatest happiness 'for us' (i.e. we *symparanekekromenoi*) with death. The adaptation of the title from Hegel is a clue that the speech will present a form of life that is bifurcated *in extremis* and lived explicitly in full view of its bifurcation, but without any internally recognizable resources for unifying itself. The problem of unhappiness as it is set out in the lecture is again one of deception: the denial of the present in past or future terms. Memory or 'recollection' (*Erindring*) is presented as a highly augmented form of reflection that

²⁹ E—O 1: 180–1/SKS 2: 177–8.

can deceive by blocking present satisfaction, and deforming hope nostalgically.³⁰ These combine in the unhappiest sorts, of which the speaker identifies eight types, some by famous literary figures, others as more generic character types.³¹ For the aesthete all that exists is what is becoming; the sort of stability that one ordinarily would think of as forming the basic features of the world is only apparent, a relic of not being mentally agile enough to question and reconfigure in imagination. Reality is flux and, more to the point, what one ordinarily takes as reality (i.e. 'what is stable') just seems so because it is locked in the amber of 'having been': it is metaphorically 'dead'. To yearn for death, even in the future, is to yearn for just this finality and rest. And the art that these dark aesthetes make is the art of the transitory, tinged with autumnal pathos. Death always attends the frivolity of aesthetic play, death experienced merely as a cessation, not a summation. The absence of the universal permeates such death; it is what is 'missed' by the defunct ones. This is why A calls the life-under-the-aspect-of-death artists the 'unhappiest ones'; theirs is decidedly not Nietzsche's resolute but joyful *amor fati*.³²

It may be possible for purposes of analysis to treat the unhappiness of the 'unhappy one' as separate from the pleasures of the aesthete, but in fact they are reciprocally reinforcing features of a single structure. Kierkegaard characteristically puts the matter in terms of the categories of actuality and possibility. Because the reflective aesthete treats the world as significant only to the extent that it is perpetually intellectually malleable, the modality in which he is oriented towards that world is possibility unhinged from actuality. The pleasure the aesthete takes in thought is provided only by treating the world as having no standing other than the possibility for being taken to be this way or that for this or that thought. There is then ultimately no actuality from the aesthete's point of view; for him all things are merely provisional. This includes, of course, the aesthete's own sense of himself; his gnawing unhappiness and world-weariness is due to just this possibility and the pleasure taken from it: the pleasant compensation for this, and the nature of its pleasure, is in the *everyday*. Anything can be special because

³⁰ E—O 1: 223/SKS 2: 217.

³¹ E—O 1: 223–30/SKS 2: 217–23.

³² This sentiment is, therefore, quite different than two others with which it might be associated. On the one hand, it is not the chilling 'wisdom of Silenos' that the best thing is never to have been born. Perhaps the most famous invocation of this idea is in the antistrophe to the choral ode in *Oed. col.* 1225: μή φῶναι τὸν ἅπαντα νικᾷ λόγον ('Not to be born surpasses thought and speech', tr. Lattimore). Heine also pays homage in his *Nachlaß* ('Gut ist der Schlaf, der Tod ist besser / Das beste wäre, nie geboren sein' ('Morphine', in: *Sämtliche Werke* 3: 277)), as does Nietzsche in the opening to *Birth of Tragedy*. And Schopenhauer built an entire philosophy around the idea. But love of death for the *symparanekromenoi* is quite another thing, requiring having lived as its counterpoint. On the other hand, their love of death is also not the more modern sense of bitter despair grasping for existential parity that one finds for instance in Ilyich's formula: 'I [shall die] first and they later, but it will be the same for them' (Мне раньше, а им после; и им то же будет).

everything must be. This hyper-awareness of possibility—so important to the artist of beauty, for whom a trifle can be shot through with the greatest significance, often collapsing whole ranges of experience into the density of a single, glancing image (e.g. Donne's 'vain bubble's shadow')³³—is the payoff. One might say that, for Kierkegaard, this hyper-perceptiveness is the positive result of the intellectual aesthete operating in high gear, even though she can only engage that gear by deepening her despair. Such engagement may be preserved in a way in the ethical sphere, but the negative toll of viewing the world as fundamentally meaningful in virtue of its impermanence exacts a price that must be paid in the currency of personal commitment.

C. *Theory and the aesthete*

We shall not treat the section 'First Love', the first of several sections that unite the prior meditations on sensual desire, intellectual immediacy, and sorrow with the theme of the nature of love. Its main point can be put succinctly: people taken as 'occasions' end up as fictions, subject to being imagined and reimagined in delusional ways.³⁴ A following section analogizes life suspended between action and inaction to a system of crop rotation. The title of the section, *Vexel-Driften*, literally means 'impulse-exchange'; the Danish 'Vexel' is cognate with the German 'Wechsel', a term that we have seen figure so prominently in romantic conceptions of dialectic (e.g. Schlegel's *Wechselbegriff*, *-bestimmung*, *-beweiß*, *-erweiß* complex).³⁵ Kierkegaard means the analogy to shed light on how as a formal matter

³³ 'Love's Alchemy' ll. 13–14, in: *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (New York: Penguin, 1971), p. 65.

³⁴ See this chapter, note 25 for an explanation of the concept of an occasion.

³⁵ This section deals in an indirect way with a central category in Kierkegaard's writings: 'repetition' (*Gjentagelse*) (R 148–9/SKS 4: 25–6). Kierkegaard states that this is both a religious category and his replacement for the Hegelian category of mediation (*Vermittlung*); accordingly, it is one of the expressions of Kierkegaard's metaphysics of change. Kierkegaard's view of Hegelian 'mediation' is that it is, appearances notwithstanding, a covert form of determining synthesis, in which there is more tolerance than in subsumptive accounts of concepts for differentiation in the objects that it structures but in which this differentiation is finally collapsed teleologically. As we have seen, this is a plausible understanding of Hegel. More to the point, however, is Kierkegaard's view concerning the diachronic properties of Hegelian mediation. He holds that conceptual progression is a matter of having the *same thing* (*Geist*, the Concept) incrementally increasing in structural explicitness. To the contrary, 'repetition' refers to a process in which the same is not-the-same in that it is new. If *r* is repeated it must have been *r* prior to the repetition, otherwise it could not be repeated. It is the same thing, *r*, that is the basis for and product of the repetition. But being-repeated was not a property of *r* in the first place; that adds something to the repeated *r*, which becomes a new composite, i.e. *repeated-r*. Repetition in this sense is distinct from serial iteration. The difference Kierkegaard perceives with Hegelian dialectic is this: repetition does not start out with the idea that a thing contains within it an algorithm of its changes that, over a series of focused permutations, reduces them to sameness. Rather, repetition allows for a dialectic of sameness and difference within the object by progressive incorporation within the object of relational properties

reflective movement might be considered constitutive of a way of life—of how it might be, so to speak, a form of ‘synthesis’. Moreover, ‘Rotation Method’ is the first explicit consideration in A’s papers of how the activity of an aesthete might be *theorized*.

The principal idea informing the agricultural analogy is that the aesthete keeps the domain (the fields) over which his reflective capacities range replete (fertile) by rotating his cultivation of the fields in one of two ways. The first method is to rotate from field to field, using up and leaving fallow one field before moving on to the next.³⁶ The differences in the plots of land hold the aesthete’s interest on this model of rotation. Adapting practices to different terrains, soil types, etc. will require knowledge, ingenuity, and the right tools. Once thought exhausts the possibilities of a given plot, one goes on to the next. For Kierkegaard this strategy is a manifest failure, and the reason is obvious. Perhaps there are an infinitely many ways to parse such domains over which thought can range, but over time the margins of novelty become finer and finer as repetition yields decreasing returns on imaginative investment. A recognizes very quickly that this first rotation method does not hold much promise as a model for continuing conceptual play and forwards a second model as superior to it. According to the second method, crops are rotated rather than fields. One stays on the same plot of land but varies either what one plants or the method of planting. Here one

(‘being-repeated’) that are not there in the first place. It is for this reason, Kierkegaard states that the aesthete first ‘loves change’ but then ‘desires repetition’. See SKPJ 162/*Papirer* IV A 169 [1844]. That is, repetition for Kierkegaard is a way to attempt to preserve novelty, not a category of redundancy. In the context of the question of A’s preparation for entering the ethical sphere from the aesthetic, Kierkegaard seems to have in mind the following. As it develops as a mode of self-world relation, repetition drives ever deeper the sense that *I* am the focus of meaningful activity. In its ultimate form, this sense is so embedded that the nature of what I take as objects of my activity does not matter at all—they are mere variables. This is preparation for ethical life in that, on Kierkegaard’s apparent understanding of the substance of ethics, a well-established sense of myself that is in principle detachable from empirical matters is of the essence. There are two things to note. First, as stated, this is a Kantian conception of ethical agency where pure practical reason is surrogate for the deepest point of subjective spontaneity (*Wille*, not *Willkür*), and thus is not yet recognizably Hegelian because the substitution of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* for pure practical reason is not yet in play. This is not to say that the Judge does not develop within his specification of the ethical sphere such Hegelian resources (e.g. in the discussion of marital love as the template for ethical recognition). Second, it does not follow from the fact that repetition so understood is a *preparation* for the ethical sphere that it is also a sufficient condition for transition from the aesthetic to the ethical spheres. In the last section of this chapter we argue that there is no sufficient condition for such a transition, aligning in part what Kierkegaard says about that transition with what he says about the transition from the ethical to the properly religious sphere. This raises the interesting further question as to whether the category of repetition is pertinent to the transition from the ethical to religious spheres. For an admirable discussion of the concept, see Dorothea Glöckner, *Kierkegaard’s Begriff der Wiederholung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998).

³⁶ E—O 1: 285–6/SKS 2: 275.

develops to a retreating limit the resources of a single structure (or a limited number of structures) by teasing out complexity internally to it. The superiority of this rotation method over the first has to do with the degree to which the aesthete can ascribe to herself the powers of imagination. In essence, constantly going from old thing to new thing by 'changing fields' is an admission that imagination is limited; it renders imagination dependent on its material. If one's imagination is as powerful and as self-forming as the aesthete hopes, one should be able to plumb single contexts to ever-increasing depths. Having to rotate through many different contexts signifies either choosing poorly contexts that do not sustain probing imaginative reconstruction or short-selling one's imaginative capacities. It is to be superficial when depth is called for in choosing appropriately challenging things on which to reflect (not to mention in actually reflecting on them). One discerns here a faint analog to Hegel's treatment of the struggle for recognition (or its beginnings) in the *Herr/Knecht* chapter of the *Phenomenology*. That analysis is supposed to show that the implicit need for mutual recognition can be actualized by objects that are not themselves particularly demanding on one: they needn't have the capacity for recognition or even be sentient. One can get a measure of a kind of 'self-confidence' (one important sense of the term '*Selbstbewußtsein*' in Hegel) by incorporating aspects of the world into one's sphere of concern and negating their independence from one, or, to put it more simply, by consuming them. But—and this is the main point of the chapter—at a certain level of development, engaging with inanimate and non-reflective animate things in this way no longer suffices to give one a sufficient sense of one's substantiality relative to the world. Pushing the frontiers of what one initially can contrast with oneself as 'other' and bring within one's sphere of activity and concern requires something that can potentially do the same to one—another human viewed as demanding recognition. The aesthete requires crop rotation for similar reasons. Just using up things *seriatim* fails the requirement that the aesthete find his substantiality in a deepening of his ability to manipulate the world through imagination. One might get some of that deepening by just heaping matter upon matter, but one might just as well be skeptical that the matters were worth much. Concentrating attention on a limited project of imaginative tuition and reconstruction, then, gives the aesthete a better sense of his powers. Ultimately Kierkegaard seems in accord with Hegel: the best possible objects for such construction are people, and by extension in particular lovers. The more advanced version of the rotation, then, involves everyday materials, which engage more powerfully the aesthete's ability to reimagine the world. This recalls Novalis' injunction to 'make the natural supernatural', i.e. to take what seems most usual and raise it above nature by submitting it to the operation of

spontaneous imaginative power. But seeking out more and more developed objects that can give one a greater sense of mastering them by overcoming their powerful resistance, as well as discovering in the broadest 'field' possible material for such reconstruction ultimately will suggest to one that other humans and one's relationships with them are the most engrossing and challenging objects for rotation. Treating people as objects for imaginative rotation adds a potential barrier to that detachment, however. The aesthete will achieve the most return for his efforts by encountering people as aesthetic objects that are as complex as is consistent with his imaginative powers of reforming them. But this introduces the need to resist the human pull of these others' demands on him. Kierkegaard fixes chauvinistically on what he takes to be the innocence of virginal women as the best possible sort of such groomed objects, and this reintroduces the standing theme of seduction back into the analysis. But the general point remains that cultivating others just up to the point at which they will rebel against their tutelage is as far as rotation dare go. This is just what seduction *is* for the aesthete operating at his most reflective; in this sense neither Don Giovanni nor Faust is a seducer at all.

The 'Diary of the Seducer' is the artistic product of such a theoretical aesthete, of one who subjects his aesthetic nature to theoretical understanding. The seducer is someone on whom the abstract formulations of the rotation method would not be lost; indeed, the diary is a chronicle of its daily practice by an active theoretical aesthete, whose theoretical self-regard more deeply embeds him in that way of life and in the despair that Kierkegaard takes to attend it. The development of the aesthete and of the existential import of the aesthetic sphere as a whole culminate here. Moreover, it is the diary that places the reader at the cusp of the ethical from within the aesthetic, opening the question of the proper philosophical role of irony as the boundary between the aesthetic and ethical spheres.

The diary is preceded by a short introduction, in which A disclaims authorship of it, explaining that he has merely discovered and edited it. He does admit, however, to knowing the woman involved.³⁷ Victor Eremita, the 'editor' of both A's and B's papers, doubts the disavowal. This double framing device raises the question of the scope and means of the 'seduction' at issue. On the one hand, the diary is a record, a 'running commentary' as its front matter puts it, from the point of view of the seducer, of events pertaining to his failed affair with a young woman, Cordelia.³⁸ Its style is highly literary, and its being so is consistent with

³⁷ E—O 1: 303ff./SKS 2: 309ff.

³⁸ Kierkegaard intends the reference to *Lear* and, in what follows, the status of the seduced will track that of Lear's youngest daughter who, when she comes into her own, is unrecognizable to her father.

the diary's having been written for the aesthete's own benefit. But its self-regard is also consistent with the diary's being intended for others (in fact, the Judge, or B, may have had access to it). This opens up the possibility that the diary is a performance on its author's part (as are many diaries, and not just ones with literary merits), and indeed a seduction of its reader. One might think that perhaps the intended reader is just the aesthete, so that the seduction in question is self-seduction. This is certainly a dimension of the diary, exhibiting not only (A) the capacity of the aesthete to keep his aesthetic self-cultivation going by displacing his primary seduction into remote aesthetic objects, but also (B) his project of staving off despair. Of course, Kierkegaard's suggestion is that (A) and (B) are strongly interactive: the capacity to create new aesthetic objects *ad libitum* is only superficially *ad libitum*, for it is motivated and controlled by despair. As with all his papers, A must navigate the attractions of the aesthetic, and the seducer is as close to a comprehensive internal view of the aesthetic as is possible. If one equates A's editorship of the papers with understanding them comprehensively, then the seducer, even if he is not in fact A, is very close to him in cast of mind. Of course viewing A's 'editorship' of this and the assembling of his papers in this fashion (are they all written by him, or just 'his' in a more capacious sense?) is conjecture. But even if A is not himself the aesthete operating at the top of his game, he is close enough for the diary to have the requisite seductive appeal.

It is obvious by name alone that Johannes, the seducer, is meant to be the Germanic double of Giovanni. (One might say this already tokens a transition to the Teutonic ideas of *bürgerliche Sittlichkeit* and *heilige Familie* that one later finds coursing through the Judge's letters to A.) But Johannes is no Giovanni.³⁹ Kierkegaard is opposing the kind of seducer Giovanni is with a kind of seduction characteristic of the more highly developed forms of the aesthetic from the interpretation of Faust, the fellowship of the defunct, and the rotation method. As we saw, women for Don Giovanni are erotic consumables; Cordelia is a spur to Johannes's erotic *imagination* and, thus, to the tale he tells himself about his life's path. Indeed, Johannes cannot experience absolute immediacy, if the 'idealist' interpretation of Kierkegaard's account of the aesthetic sphere on offer is correct, i.e. that representations of unreflective immediacy such as Don Giovanni are only imaginative and idealized projections on the part of reflective aesthetes (e.g. A). Johannes uses such imagined immediacy as a way to construct a narrative of his life in just this way. But his dealings with Cordelia, each calculated to the last digit and involving equal parts engagement and detachment, are meant to instill in *her* a radical disequilibrium: she does not know at any one time

³⁹ Here I believe I am in disagreement with Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, pp. 30–1.

whether he is coming or going. Johannes employs a metaphor from mechanics to structure what he takes to be the principle of action governing being an aesthete of this type. In early modern physics there were a number of attempts to explain the possibility of 'action at a distance', i.e. the influence of one (usually massive) body on another, where the bodies were separated by (usually great) distances. Kierkegaard is not interested in the substance of any of these proposals, but invokes them in describing the *modus vivendi* of the seducer: to act upon someone without touching that someone. Johannes' actions are in this way active counterparts to shadowgraphs. The diary begins by chronicling a series of voyeuristic diversions—Johannes' chance encounters on the street with others during his daily walks. In truth, these are hardly encounters at all; sometimes Johannes merely observes people or scenes at a distance, in order to provide himself with material indeterminate enough for his fantasies. He cares so little to know about them concretely that they cannot be objects of romantic pursuit. His involvement with Cordelia is at first experienced by him as slightly aggravating, impinging on these frictionless reveries. But he soon comes to find that she is a much more rewarding object of his attention because there is more potential complexity with which to work (in essence, graduating from crop rotation method one to method two).

This may not seem at first like much of an advance over Faust, who at least felt the sting of the ethical, albeit translated into sensual terms. It is tempting to look here for a simple dialectic of hastened advance to an ethical perspective in which the subject is beholden to external norms. This might seem reasonable because there is an evolution of this sort from Giovanni to Faust and a parallel one, we are led to believe, within A, whose papers after all present these types as parts of such progression. But closer attention to the diary reveals that it is part of the aesthete's unfolding understanding of the hopelessness of his own situation. Whereas both Giovanni and Faust treat their aesthetic objects in ways that require those objects to be mere vehicles for the instantiation of their own subjective desire, Johannes handles Cordelia with increasing care to cultivate her sense of her own independence. He educates her precisely to this end: to step away from her antecedent familial ties in order to become intellectually worthy of being an object upon which his rotation method can dwell. His desire is to create and then dominate freedom that is *really there*, not a pale imitation of freedom. He is both hedonistic and heedless, playing with her budding ethical self-awareness for his own benefit. This is what makes his seduction so reprehensible. At least Don Giovanni, and to a lesser extent Faust, can claim on their behalf that they were blinded to the impacts of their actions on account of being overwhelmed by their more naïve, distorting equation of freedom with sensual

or intellectual transition.⁴⁰ This defense, if it is one, is unavailable to Johannes; he is fully aware of what he is doing. His betrayal of Cordelia is all the more terrible for being executed in full view of her *as a person*. Dialectically speaking, this is a clear advance in awareness of the objective standing of the other; even so, one might suggest that this is *not* the main dialectical part the diary plays in the overall context of A's papers. It is true that the demand for regard awakened in *Cordelia* through Johannes' tuition anticipates the ethical claims of B on A. Still, it is in the relation of Johannes *to A* that the progression consists. Johannes is deployed in the diary to show most explicitly what A judges it must be like to be an 'optimal' reflective aesthete; when one develops another into the most complex and challenging object for imaginative reconstruction, one thereby develops within that other freedom and the demand for others to respect it. What really appears, then, is Johannes' dependence on Cordelia, again much in the fashion of the dependence of Lord on Bondsman in Hegel, or of Lear on Cordelia's namesake. True, Johannes sends Cordelia's letters back to her unopened, asserting his freedom over and against her demand for recognition.⁴¹ There is another way to look at the matter, however: Johannes cannot face up to opening the letters and thus fails to stand before his own creation. On this interpretation, she has the upper hand; he cannot imagine how to open the letters while retaining his identity as a seducer. Alternatively, one might put the point as follows. Cordelia's nascent claim for ethical regard is expressed in the very act of writing letters, regardless of whether they are opened or not. (The letters, as *we* know, also have such claims as their content.) Returning the letters unopened hardly evinces confidence on Johannes' part in the face of the agency their author manifests in sending them, let alone the content he does not dare to read. He is either 'aesthetically weak', uncomfortably open to the demands of the ethical in love, or he has missed a further opportunity to turn her around his finger by opening and responding to the letters aesthetically.

The presentation of the baroque intricacies of aestheticism in the first volume of *Either—Or* is complete with the section in the diary that raises the possibility of including A as a character in what is authored. The turn to the diary form, the intimation that A may be the diarist and not merely someone presenting another's diary, and the idea of an express judgment (or self-judgment) by A of the diarist all become part of A's aesthetic output. In short, the presentation of the

⁴⁰ It is telling that the relationship of Johannes to Cordelia is devoid of sex; the sensual immediate has no inherent value for him.

⁴¹ It is not the return of the letters that is significant: it was customary in polite society of the time to return personal letters at the end of an affair. It is that they are unopened—never read—that matters.

‘Diary of the Seducer’ is the medium in which A is present in his own papers. This entails, among other things, that his stepping outside of that narrative to render a judgment on it as a whole is no simple matter. It is, rather, a matter of *irony*. A’s evaluation of Johannes is quite pointed and may anticipate the ethical evaluation of aesthetes to come in B’s papers. But A finds Johannes’ behavior and train of thought disturbing and horrifying in a way that suggests precisely the kind of deep repugnance one often has towards one’s own past misdeeds. In any case, A has no command over what comes after Johannes. The consideration of the case leaves off just here, where the characters within the first volume and A as the pseudonymous author of the works it contains intersect most perfectly. There are indications planted in A’s papers of the stirring of an ethical outlook within the most refined types of the aesthete; however, there is no discussion there of a way to become ethical upon aesthetic dissatisfaction and no intimation of a mechanism to go from ‘here’ to ‘there’. Irony, while not precisely that mechanism, provides a missing piece in Kierkegaard’s account of the relation of the ethical to the aesthetic. But Kierkegaard’s account of irony is not present in its details in *Either—Or*; it must be imported from without.

Irony: Kierkegaard’s Initial View

In order to determine what role irony might play in the transition between the aesthetic and ethical spheres one must go back to Kierkegaard’s dissertation *On the Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates*. This work most explicitly triangulates the main historical sources central to Kierkegaard’s views on the nature and philosophical prospects of irony: Socrates, Hegel, and the early German romantics. The subtitle of the thesis gives a sense right away of the overarching importance of the figure of Socrates—not only Plato’s depictions of him, but those of others as well. Kierkegaard’s main objection to scholarship on the history of Greek philosophy of his time is that Socrates is misunderstood as being only superficially ironic. Kierkegaard accepts what was then and is now the truism that an ironist (εἰρων) is a dissembler, someone who means one thing and says the opposite.⁴² So classified the ironist is close to being a liar, the difference between them residing in the purpose to which deception is put. The liar’s intent is to deceive an audience, to cause them to believe as true what the speaker takes to be false. The ironist’s is to express his ‘inner’, covert state of mind by uttering its opposite; he means one thing *by* saying the opposite. The Greeks considered irony

⁴² The *locus classicus* for the negative view of irony is Theophrastus, *Char.* I, A. Aristotle is more tolerant, if perhaps in nostalgic retrospect. See *Eth. Nich.* 1108a11–24.

to be tolerable in moderation. If it became a pervasive way of expressing oneself, irony could be considered a deficiency of character conceptually related to ethical defects of misrepresentation and speciousness. Socrates of course was such a character, and part of Kierkegaard's precocity is to see his irony, well before Nietzsche does, as essentially un-Greek. But, for Kierkegaard, as it stands this is not a very telling account of the lasting effect of Socratic irony. Understanding irony on this local level as a mere speech act invites the impression that one may take the measure of the ironist merely by reversing the plain meaning of any utterance externally marked as ironic, thereby deciphering the 'internal' state of the speaker. Socrates' craft is to take a manner of speaking that elicits at best ethically 'grey' responses from interlocutors and generalize it into a lifestyle by being ironic about that category of speech and the usual ethical response to it. Socratic irony is not pervasive in the sense that it is quantitatively extreme, i.e. because it involves a lot of verbal irony. It is rather *being* ironic that gives Socrates' verbal irony its depth—a thought about Socrates that Kierkegaard must have encountered in Schlegel. Irony can be a *standpoint* from which one views the world at large.⁴³

The social effect of Socratic irony—and this is again a point Schlegel stresses—is the implicit division of an audience into public and private groupings. The private group consists in those who 'get' the irony, and it is crucial that they get it on their own. (Nothing kills irony better and more quickly than having to lay it out explicitly.) In a sense, then, these insiders are a self-chosen elect. They are elect because part of their getting the irony is that, in getting it, they mark themselves off from those who do not get it and feel superior to the latter. They are self-chosen because, even though the ironic remark may originate with only one of them, they are constituted by their own intellectual exercise of getting it without being led to do so. The public group is constituted by those who do not get it, and the reactions in not getting it can range from cluelessness (if the irony just goes over their heads) to outrage at being made to feel inferior in intellect and social status (if they are then told what they did not get at first).⁴⁴ The pleasure taken in being on the receiving end of irony as an insider, and not as its butt, is that of being selected for special positive treatment, of being sophisticated, and of being both of these things in front of others. So deeply ingrained is this structure that one may satisfy these requirements for irony all by oneself; no

⁴³ CI 253/SKS 1: 292. I take it that this is what Kierkegaard means when he calls Socratic irony correctly understood 'irony *sensu eminentiori*' (CI 254/SKS 1: 292). It is 'more eminent' because it informs one's basic outlook on the world and, therefore, produces patterns of responsiveness to that world.

⁴⁴ CI 248–9/SKS 1: 287–8.

actual third party is needed, although a distinction between a projected in-crowd and a projected out-crowd must still be present to underwrite the superiority. Indeed, one might find irony in monolog form the epitome of the form.

Now, one might think that this more socially nuanced conception of irony is a simple modification of the verbal one. For the bifurcated structure of the social view seems to simply accrete around the same basic practice of saying the opposite of what one means. But, to the ironic audience the ironist precisely does not say the opposite of what he means; his meaning is clear, and part of the pleasure taken in participating in irony from the audience's standpoint is the experience, if one really is like-minded and quick enough, of inference collapsing into immediate uptake. This experience of mental quickness in getting irony is a proper component of getting it at all; it is part of its phenomenology. When one gets it, one not only gets a thought-content, but one gets that one got it and that one got it on the go. Moreover, the quickness itself implicitly trades on a distinction between intellectual alacrity and having to reason the thing out. There are plenty of talented physicists (and philosophers) who have tin ears for irony, but not because they are dense; rather, they take primary pleasure in what they do best, *working through* a complex problem. Still, something like saying the opposite of what one means perhaps does mark the ironist as she appears to those who do *not* get it. 'Incomprehensibility', as Schlegel might call it, might not literally result in this as a deception, but the feeling of 'not getting it' trades on an inability to equate the 'inner' and 'outer' aspects of what is meant. And this is what is of essence, in turn, to the ironic audience's superiority. Thus, in an indirect way, irony does involve dissimulation, albeit reflected through this complex lens of communication.

Further consideration of the social dimension of ironic practice, however, complicates this mundane story of the pragmatics of verbal irony *qua* dissimulation. For it leaves a crucial component of irony unaccounted for: the degree or type of commitment an ironist has to his irony. Kierkegaard's main contention here is informed by Hegel, i.e. that the commitment of the ironist to his irony is problematic, as is any social structure built upon irony. The simple picture of verbal irony suggests that once one registers that an utterance is ironic one merely performs a mental operation of reversal of the overt content in order to arrive at the intended content. On this picture, then, irony is just a roundabout way of communicating content that can or ought to be stated directly.⁴⁵ The more nuanced understanding set out above adds to this the idea that irony creates a kind of community defined by its linguistically enforced exclusion of others as

⁴⁵ CI 248/SKS 1: 287.

inferior. As we saw above, this still leaves the impression that one might pierce through an external linguistic act to some *determinate* thought on the part of the ironist in order to complete the circuit, so to speak, of irony. Kierkegaard sharply calls into question this notion of commitment to a determinate thought-content in irony. It is up to the audience to pin down the non-ironic thought, and it is of the nature of irony that the speaker will not help in this. But ‘negating’ the external meaning of an expression to arrive at its internal or core sense is no easy matter, for such a negation leaves open many possibilities, not merely the ‘opposite’ of the negated thought. Determination *ex negativo* is a tricky business, as we saw in connection with both Schlegel and Hegel, requiring sufficient background context to settle out what is and is not included in the meaning of terms, concepts, and claims. The ironist has no inherent responsibility for the content of his thought; one’s statement can be taken in any number of ways, and the ironist must not police them on pain of the failure of irony altogether.⁴⁶ One well might think in turn that this indeterminacy of the non-ironic ‘substrate’ of irony and the attendant lack of commitment to it could only constitute a transient, commitment-free social group with the ironist as ringleader. But the group is deceived; while they are on the chase for thought, the ironist pursues only the effect of thought. They are unaware of their transience. Rather than communicating his meaning, the ironist prompts the others to contribute theirs, as if to interpret his speech. As in a cult he remains hidden; it is the cult members who are revealed.⁴⁷

In a way, the Kierkegaard of *Concept of Irony* holds that irony of this sort—Socrates’ irony as presented by Plato—is then not *really* a form of communication. This gives the Socrates of Aristophanes added heft in Kierkegaard’s estimation.⁴⁸ For even after one achieves a more sophisticated and less speech act-dominated account of irony, one ends up with a more sophisticated form of dissimulation in irony: the dissimulation *that it is a form of communication*. The ironist is not really interested in communicating content for himself or others; it is rather the lack of commitment to content that is crucial. This seems to indicate one possible intersection of the Socratic ironist with the reflective aesthete of *Either—Or*. As we hope to show in what follows, this is ultimately not the most profitable way to understand the importance of either Socratic or romantic irony to Kierkegaard. But, if one were to stop here with *Concept of Irony* and ask what sort of sphere the ironist inhabited, it would surely be aesthetic; for the ironist seems a seducer of a

⁴⁶ CI 247–8/SKS 1: 286–7.

⁴⁷ CI 251/SKS 1: 289.

⁴⁸ See CI 128ff./SKS 1: 179ff. Kierkegaard also considers Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* but finds the portrayal of Socrates there too superficial to take seriously. CI 13ff./SKS 1: 75ff.

very refined sort. According to the Kierkegaard of the dissertation, the ironist speaks in order to be negatively free, free *from* cognitive commitment, and the way that this freedom externally manifests itself to the ironist is as a power over an audience (himself included, one might add) that is forever on the trail of his meanings. In truth, the dissimulation in irony is not semantic; it is social-epistemological. This negative freedom is a feature of merely verbal irony, which Kierkegaard says simply ‘cancels itself out’,⁴⁹ but it also informs the more social, ‘existential’ variety of irony, gaining force as part of the self-conception of the ironist.⁵⁰ The ironist floats above what he constitutes, indifferent to the substance of the opinions of others and increasingly detached from society. The ironist’s negative freedom is parasitic on the indeterminacy he cultivates in his audience (and himself) through feigned communication. Nor can the scope of this ironizing mode of being be contained: if one is really an ironist, as Kierkegaard holds Socrates to be, one will insist that anything can be subject to irony since the freedom in question is ultimately freedom from the world.

Kierkegaard includes a shorter, but still substantive final section on romantic irony in the dissertation. The romantics were a significant presence in Danish thought in Kierkegaard’s time. Kierkegaard enters into the attempt to take its measure by assessing its understanding of Plato. German-language work on Plato in the early nineteenth century was of an order not seen since the Italian Renaissance. Several new translations and editions of Plato’s works appeared—Schleiermacher’s monumental edition, for example, and Ast’s—that were ordered around very strong views concerning the taxonomy and chronology of the dialogues. Schleiermacher in particular exerted tremendous authority in the organization of texts around what he took to be a univocal development of Plato’s metaphysical views, a position sometimes mistakenly credited as original to Jaeger. Hegel by and large followed this trend in his analysis of Greek philosophy, particularly in his Berlin lectures on the history of philosophy. Kierkegaard, although he is impressed by its philological genius and achievement, resists this whole line of thought. While he agrees that Plato creates a dramatic character ‘Socrates’ and is not just recording matters for historical accuracy⁵¹ (what would *that* concept even look like for Plato?), Kierkegaard also holds that it is possible to catch glimpses of the ‘real’ Socrates within at least some of the dialogues.⁵² In particular, two kinds of irony coexist and vie with one another in them: Socratic

⁴⁹ CI 248/SKS 1: 286.

⁵⁰ CI 261/SKS 1: 299.

⁵¹ The great exception to this rule for Kierkegaard is *Apology*. See the discussion later in this chapter.

⁵² CI 30–2/SKS 1: 92–3.

irony, which we have already considered, and Platonic irony.⁵³ Platonic irony is comparatively flatfooted. It is 'Seventh Letter' irony, operating to separate the metaphysically adept from the inept. It is 'positive', whereas Socratic irony is 'negative', in that it in the end asserts knowledge and does not rest with knowing ignorance. These two orders of irony intersect at many places in the dialogues, creating ambiguity for the reader,⁵⁴ but Kierkegaard holds a strong view on their distinction: Socratic irony is both more interesting and ultimately outside Plato's comprehension.⁵⁵ Kierkegaard's main interest falls accordingly on the dialogue he takes to be the least formed by Plato's irony and, thus, most purely Socratic, *Apology*.⁵⁶

Kierkegaard's view that *Apology* has priority over the other dialogues in tracking down specifically Socratic irony is, as he acknowledges, contrary to scholarly consensus.⁵⁷ One might think that his reason for assigning priority to *Apology* is an antecedent finding of the prominence of a characteristically Socratic irony in the dialogue. But that is the reverse of Kierkegaard's procedure. Perhaps because he is responding as a graduate student to the state of historiographical philology of Ast and others, Kierkegaard's method is to argue what he takes to be historical evidence that *Apology* is non-Platonic in the relevant sense and then, after establishing that, to mine from the text the general account of pure Socratic irony to be applied to other dialogues to parse their Socratic and Platonic elements. In a way, it is Hegelian to argue in this fashion that a work must be understood first as a product of historical forces that tend to the development of central ideas. Given this constraint, one can specify the internal workings of specific theories in terms of instantiations of those forces.⁵⁸ This enables Kierkegaard to charge romantic conceptions of irony with being historically belated, out of sync with the times in a philosophically significant way. The advent of a specifically philosophical irony was a world-altering event, but that time is well past. Romantic irony is, accordingly, 'unjustified' by the history of philosophy, an anachronism that invites backsliding into antiquity.⁵⁹

Kierkegaard's treatment of the romantics is generally critical and bears marks of the (qualified) Hegelianism of his youth. Indeed, Hegel's own negative

⁵³ CI 87–8, 93–4, 121/SKS 1: 143–4, 147–8, 172. A recent consideration of the distinction between Socratic and Platonic irony is Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁵⁴ CI 40ff./SKS 1: 102ff. Here Kierkegaard is quite critical of Hegel's approach, accusing him essentially of conflating Platonic and Socratic irony. CI 265ff./SKS 1: 263ff.

⁵⁵ CI 40/SKS 1: 102.

⁵⁶ CI 80/SKS 1: 138.

⁵⁷ See CI 37/SKS 1: 98.

⁵⁸ See CI 171/SKS 1: 219, where Kierkegaard connects this with the invention of the concept of subjectivity in Western philosophy.

⁵⁹ See CI 242, 271/SKS 1: 282, 308.

assessment of the Jena circle can seem to control it. Perhaps most telling is the reliance on Solger, whom we have already discussed in relation to Hegel, and whom Kierkegaard treats both as a trusted guide to the views of individual romantics and as the best statement of what systematic romanticism might amount to.⁶⁰ But Kierkegaard goes beyond Solger's filtering of German romanticism to devote considerable attention to select literary writings of Schlegel and Tieck. Kierkegaard concurs with Hegel that romanticism is basically an aestheticized extrapolation from Fichte's account of subjectivity.⁶¹ And he goes even further than Hegel in placing the romanticism of the Jena group in the rearguard, for he holds that Socratic irony already incorporates the high degree of reflexivity that Hegel credits as the sole innovation of romantic irony.⁶² Kierkegaard's verdict on the conceptual resources of romantic irony is just an application of the one he has reached already in his consideration of the Socratic case. If the ironist applies irony to himself, then irony as a global principle for thought and action is self-undermining. If, on the other hand, the ironist retreats from the reflexive application of irony, his irony is not global enough to constitute a form of life. This pattern is no surprise: Kierkegaard's background contention is after

⁶⁰ See CI 308ff./SKS 1: 340ff. Kierkegaard views the ultimate value of Solger's systematization of romantic aesthetics to be that it is 'a sacrifice to Hegel's positive system' (CI 323/SKS 1: 352). We saw that this is Hegel's verdict as well.

⁶¹ CI 272ff./SKS 1: 308ff. Fichte is a possible source for Kierkegaard's characterization of either the developed aesthete or the Judge. It is even possible that different aspects of Fichte's thought are inspirations for both. To complicate matters, there were a variety of Fichtean interpretations of philosophical positions and of historical figures current at Kierkegaard's time, which may not be Fichte's own, that Kierkegaard might have taken on board. Chief of the latter, one might nominate Hegel's elision of Fichte and the Jena romantics. Or one might hold that Kierkegaard operates with a loosely Fichtean conception of Kant's philosophy, Hegel's, or both. As is usual, one may presume that Kierkegaard is expert in covering his tracks and, furthermore, that he may invite multiple interpretations as to the source positions for the ethical. Any simple identification with Fichte would have to contend with Kierkegaard's overarching claim to be repurposing a version of Hegelian dialectic as an account of transitions between spheres generally. (Of course, one might argue that the repurposing, at least with regard to transition from the aesthetic to the ethical spheres is Fichtean in nature.) In any case, the possibility that a view closer to the Jena position on the grounds for intersubjectivity like Fichte's ethics of conviction is on offer in the ethical sphere introduces hope for simplifying the account of the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical spheres. For, if the ethical realm were organized primarily around Fichte's conception of ethical conviction, one might have an easier time showing that there is seamless development from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical, given that one might also hold that the later stages of the aesthetic sphere may also be seen as Fichtean. I am not certain that is right but, in any event, it is more likely in my estimation that Kierkegaard is dealing with composites in his characterization of the ethical position (as he does in his characterization of the aesthetic) that spoil any simple story about the transition from one sphere to the other. At the end of this chapter, I argue that such a transition must be by 'leap' prepared by irony. In essence, I argue that it is Schlegel, not Kant, Fichte, or Hegel that is of essence when it comes to the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical spheres.

⁶² This follows from Kierkegaard's earlier claim that Hegel interprets all Platonic dialogues metaphysically, not ironically.

all that romanticism is a form of nostalgia atavistically tied to Greek culture. Its purchase on irony is similarly dependent and therefore also out of step with the present. In particular, it is out of step with the *ethical* present. This specification of ethics as the critical test that romanticism fails is a novel feature of Kierkegaard's treatment of Schlegel in the dissertation. Recall that Hegel argues that romanticism develops out of Kant and Fichte and is, in its way, progressive. Kierkegaard denies this. Rather, if one were to ask what new twist romantic irony offers, the Kierkegaard of the dissertation would answer that romanticism brings a basically Socratic view of irony as an 'existence sphere' into connection with Kantian and Hegelian ethical theories.⁶³ This is why Kierkegaard focuses mainly on *Lucinde*. It is a tract, according to Kierkegaard, explicitly aimed at 'suspending' ethics⁶⁴ by criticizing marriage⁶⁵ as boring, unavoidably middle-class, and yet as paradigmatic of ethical life.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding Kierkegaard's rather negative general appraisal of romantic irony on interconnected Socratic and Solger-Hegelian grounds, there is positive character in irony as it is presented in the dissertation, for its skeptical impulse can be harnessed to critique a convention that requires unstinting personal scrutiny. Irony's lack of plain meaning can be an aid and not a hindrance here, for more direct forms of criticism either may not have the impact of indirect questioning or will be wholly inappropriate if the order to be criticized is not yet sufficiently cognitively developed to withstand such directness. Irony is thus an ideal critical tool when one is operating within an order that seems to require change but before it is evident what direction that change should take.⁶⁷ This was Socrates' contribution, but his irony was only appropriate critically because, in Kierkegaard's judgment, Attic society was in just the state specified. At the time of the dissertation, by contrast, Kierkegaard seems to hold that the basic framework of ethics is at least foreseeably complete, rendering irony redundant.⁶⁸

⁶³ CI 256/SKS 1: 295.

⁶⁴ 'Ethics' here translates 'det Sædelige', the Danish equivalent to Hegel's 'Sittlichkeit'. I do not think much should be made of this; Kierkegaard sometimes follows the Hegelian contrast between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* (*Moralen*), where the latter term denotes Kantian moral theory. But he often does not.

⁶⁵ When we turn to B's papers later in this chapter we shall see that marriage is the ethical institution par excellence there as well. We have of course already had an intimation of this in the 'Seducer's Diary', which concerns a failed courtship.

⁶⁶ CI 286–7, 290/SKS 1: 321–2, 324. Kierkegaard also states that the novel is 'not only immoral but also unpoetic, for [it] is irreligious' (CI 297/SKS 1: 330). See also CI 305/SKS 1: 337–8, where Kierkegaard levels the same charge against Tieck.

⁶⁷ CI 260–2/SKS 1: 298.

⁶⁸ Nor does Kierkegaard allow that irony can be properly religious. He admits that irony has a religious coloring to it, but he holds that the ironist is not religious in bearing. One steeped in religious faith turns from finite matters on account of their transience and lack of ultimate value, but

Irony: Kierkegaard's Developed View

Kierkegaard's views on the value of irony develop in subtle but significant ways in the few years between the dissertation and the mid-1840s. One does not have to conjecture here; Kierkegaard in the voice of Climacus rejects the interpretation of irony by 'Magister Kierkegaard' in his dissertation as one-sided on account of its reduction of irony to one of its two components: achieving ironic distance.⁶⁹ Indeed, the final section of the dissertation, in which Kierkegaard develops the idea that irony has a positive role in ethics if it is 'controlled' or 'mastered', already incorporates some of this more considered view. However, the concept of controlled irony remains thin in the dissertation. The main idea is that irony can play a positive role in the development of ethical thought if irony is sufficiently global, as in Socrates, and conditioned 'historically' by ethical concerns.⁷⁰ Irony is 'controlled' or 'mastered' to the extent that it is pressed into service and guided by ethical dictates.

Kierkegaard later expands on the idea that a suitably modified form of irony can be a proper part of ethical regard by marrying that idea with the ontology of the spheres of existence, conceiving of irony as a replacement for the Hegelian concept of sublation at the transition between the aesthetic and the ethical spheres. The idea of a sphere of existence in Kierkegaard stands in for that of a form of consciousness in Hegel, and the ontology of spheres of existence challenges the core Hegelian idea of a seamless, necessary, and completely immanent transition between spheres. Kierkegaard's more developed account of irony, accordingly, is central to his adaptive critique of Hegelian dialectic.

The key to the critique is what Kierkegaard refers to as a *confinium*, a boundary⁷¹ that lies between two spheres but that is in important respects part of neither.⁷² Irony is one such boundary, located between the aesthetic and ethical spheres; humor is the other, located between the ethical and religious spheres. Inherent to their status as transition points is that they afford unique

that is because she has found something otherworldly that *is* of ultimate value. The ironist's conception of her own freedom, by contrast, requires rejecting any transcendent source of value. CI 258/SKS 1: 296. Cf. note 66, this chapter.

⁶⁹ CUP I: 503/SKS 7: 456.

⁷⁰ CI 327–8/SKS 1: 354–5.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard uses this term in connection with irony as early as *Concept of Irony* but had not yet developed his conception of spheres of existence. CI 121/SKS 1: 173.

⁷² CUP 501–2/SKS 7: 455. Alternatively, irony is an 'existence-qualification' (*Existents-Bestemmelse*) (CUP 503/SKS 7: 457). Neither the figure of the ironist nor irony as a *confinium* between the aesthetic and the ethical is explicitly present in *Either—Or*. Given the consideration of controlled irony and the use of the concept of a *confinium* in *Concept of Irony* and in connection with the doctrines of the spheres of existence in *Postscript*, I believe it permissible to use the idea of a *confinium* in interpreting *Either—Or*.

(though different) forms of understanding both of existentially prior spheres and of the content of one's existence within a superseding sphere. Irony considered under the rubric of a *confinium* is best viewed as a relation that has two connected properties, each of which corresponds to one of the two directions of the relation within Kierkegaard's dialectic.⁷³ In the first place, it is *prospective*: it is oriented forward as an anticipation of the next existential sphere, i.e. the ethical. It is in this aspect that a *confinium* operates as a transitional point from one sphere to another. In fact—and this is crucial—irony's being a passageway to that next sphere consists *solely* in its anticipatory status. Nothing more need be added to irony to generate receptivity to the ethical outlook; it tokens the internal disintegration of the aesthetic outlook, which is sufficient to initiate movement to the ethical.⁷⁴ Second, irony considered as a *confinium* is *retrospective*, for it can be deployed after a transition between spheres in order to cement an understanding of how one sphere gives rise to another. This post-transition role of a *confinium* is for Kierkegaard latent in the relation even before the transition is brought into effect. It serves to check the tendency of a new sphere to claim exclusivity against both the outlook of the superseded sphere and any further developments. Kierkegaard sometimes refers to this operation of a *confinium* as an 'incognito'.⁷⁵ It is a form of agency, hidden within a sphere into which one has transitioned, that indirectly harks back to the form of life of a prior sphere (perhaps even two prior spheres in the case of religiosity). The best translation into English of the term 'confinium', comprehending both of these aspects of the boundary to spheres, might be the Latinate noun 'confines' (as in: 'the herd remained within the confines of the farm'). This denotes both the conscription of a domain and a hard border (e.g. a property line) between it and another domain. What is proper to the domain is bound within it; what is outside it is relative to it improper. There is a tendency, especially in much Kierkegaard scholarship that takes transitions between spheres of existence to be abrupt, to think of such boundary points as frontiers, merely, and correctly so far as it goes, as endpoints that are not themselves parts of the continua that they bound. But 'confines' gives a better sense of the operation of a boundary in

⁷³ The relation, like Hegel's concept of dialectical relation, is not strictly reciprocal, although it is bidirectional. That is both because (1) the quality of the relation changes depending on its direction and (2) the complete description of the nature of the relation that takes both of its directions into account is not the same as the description of the two relations: the whole of the relation is greater than the sum of its directions.

⁷⁴ I am trying to avoid using causal language or the language of reasons to characterize the nature of the transition between spheres for Kierkegaard. Using such language would give what I shall argue is a mistaken impression of the nature of those transitions and would obscure the importance of the role of irony for him.

⁷⁵ See CUP 1: 500–9/SKS 7: 453–61.

drawing a domain together into a whole, i.e. into a single bounded thing. This allows better for the idea that *confinia* are not only dividing lines or interstices between spheres, but also that they endure ‘after the passage’ in various forms of self-regard as what Kierkegaard sometimes calls ‘mementos’.

Irony so understood is a proper component of the ontology of spheres of existence. But because its role is to effect the transition between the aesthetic and ethical spheres in a way that both summarizes the one and anticipates the other—in fact, its summation of the one is by way of anticipating the other, and vice-versa—it is impossible to fully examine this role in Kierkegaard’s account of the spheres of existence without first considering his presentation of the ethical sphere. So, it is necessary to turn back to *Either—Or* at this point in the analysis and return to the topic of irony directly afterward.

Spheres of Existence II: The Ethical

Kierkegaard’s presentation of the relation between the aesthetic and the ethical depends on parallels established at the juncture of the end of the diary and the outset of B’s papers. The papers mainly consist of two extended letters from B to A. It is left to the reader—there are indications both ways—to consider whether B writes his letters to A before or after he has seen A’s own papers. If he has seen them, B will know of the unopened letters of the diary and, what is more, he will know the content of the letters, since the letters are ‘copied’ into A’s preamble to the diary. This of course casts doubt on the reliability of Johannes’ claim not to have read the letters, and, on the presupposition that Johannes is A, on A’s reliability as well. This unreliability of A, on the assumption that A is Johannes, need not infect the whole of his papers (although it might). A more interesting possibility is that A becomes more reliable as he works through higher orders of being an aesthete. Advanced forms of aestheticism require more complex kinds of artifice and self-deception: the greater his despair, the greater the aesthete’s self-knowledge and his need to obscure that very despair. So even if that despair does not drive the aesthete—here, A—to be a more objective reporter of that life (in essence, as we shall see, a more ‘ironic’ reporter), he may still be a more accurate barometer of the behavior of the aesthete given the pitch of his despair. Eremita confides that although he has no textual or extra-textual basis for thinking that A and B are the same person, he cannot rid himself of the thought that they might be.⁷⁶ If one credits this thought that A might be B (or that they

⁷⁶ E—O 1: 13–14/SKS 2: 20–1. Are A and B the ‘same person’, and why would that matter? The best that can be said concerning the first part of the question is: they might be the same and yet

should be treated as identical), things become even more vertiginous. For then the question of self-address, of whether B's letters to himself (in his A-guise) are 'opened', takes on a metaphorical force. 'Opened' here may mean 'heeded', driving the question of reliability and self-subterfuge even deeper into the text. It is easy to get lost in the hall of mirrors that Kierkegaard constructs, but one only enters it if certain conditional questions become prominent in one's reading of the text: what if A is B?, what if Johannes is A?, and so on. Entertaining such possibilities is an imaginative act, and the aesthete's imagination aspires to nothing but these possibilities. So it is likely that the more one engages the text in this way—an engagement that does not really seem optional once one penetrates deeply enough into it—the more one becomes 'aesthetic' towards it. That does not mean becoming an aesthete towards the text; rather it means treating it with circumspection. In any event, Kierkegaard certainly calculates these ambiguities; there is no key to their resolution, no perfect answer to the riddle. *This* is the key to the calculation (and a thought worthy of Schlegel).

One can say, then, that the textual joint on which the relationship of A and B hinges is the status of *letters* as forms of possible communication. As we saw, Cordelia is educated by Johannes away from her immediacy, her family, thereby gaining a measure of autonomy. This is Johannes' intent; she must become 'interesting' so that his fictionalizing play on her has the most potency for him. But, the more she is a person and not just an object for him, the more she will

they might not. I believe Kierkegaard calculates this ambiguity as another permutation of the 'either—or' theme of the book. The evidence for 'the identity of A and B' (which is, in itself, a kind of dialectical in-joke) is indirect, an oblique comment by the pseudonymous editor Victor that he suspects that this might be so. But it is enough to generate the sought-after ambiguity. What is more, the source of that information is itself arguably identical with A (or by extension A and B). As is fitting in Kierkegaard's authorial house of mirrors, the evidence for *this* attribution is even more equivocal. It is really only a vague implication that can be culled from three statements, two of which are by Victor, of which both are external to *Either—Or*. The first is from *Stages*, where Victor appears as one of Constantius' symposiasts and where his statements on Mozart bear very strong resemblance to A's (SLW 28–7/SKS 6: 32–3). The other is from the sections of the *Postscript* where Climacus sets out his reactions to the previous authorial works in Kierkegaard's corpus. In a footnote to his comments on *Either—Or*, Climacus reports that Eremita disclaims any further attempts to render the significance of Mozart in words (CUP 284 n./SKS 7: 259 n.). Louis Mackey goes too far perhaps in pressing the case for Victor as A—after all, the two statements are consistent with an admiring editor's adaptation of the materials he has found in the manuscript—but the hint is there. See *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 33. A third statement comes from *Repetition*, where Constantius, in another of *his* guises, refers to an unnamed person who is suspiciously like A as deceptive (R 133–4/SKS 4: 11–12.), but does not mention any connection of A to either B or Victor. The reason interchangeable identity makes a difference here is obvious. Authorial identity and 'taking authority' for something are precisely what are at issue in the aesthetic, and they are raised to the highest degree of explicitness within the aesthetic by the ironist.

press her being a person on him. This provides added friction but, as we remarked, it can also fuel the aesthete's sense of his own capacity. If he is able to master her freedom he can receive back a display of his power to do so and thus of his freedom. But, she *is* a person for whom regarding another is to call for commitment to her, or—to put it in the terms that a well-developed aesthete is most likely to recognize as relevant—for acceptance of her uniqueness as the person she is. But this is precisely the commitment that Johannes cannot make. The point is subtle, and one can appreciate its subtlety in light of Kierkegaard's early treatment of irony. It is true that Cordelia demands at least proto-ethical regard and, to the extent that Johannes cannot give that regard, he is ethically limited. In a way, Johannes is even willing to accept that, with the proviso that what others mean by 'ethics' is just stupid fixity. But the subtle point, which we have tried to preserve in our formulation above, is that he cannot even acknowledge her as a fellow *aesthete*. The strong implication is that this is not peculiar to him; it is a general point about the possibility of intersubjectivity, and therefore of society, for aesthetes, be they 'defunct' or otherwise. Letters—writing them, sending them, receiving them, reading them—are forms of intersubjective communication. The judge communicates in just this way and, if he were subtler than he is, he might not ever write them for fear that they could not be communications *to A*. For the alert reader, the question of whether B writes the letters in vain arcs over his papers. More than this, the very question of whether there can be communication between the aesthete and the judge or whether they are sealed off in their respective spheres from one another—at least in terms of their reasons for being in those spheres—is pervasive. We shall return to consider this point later in this chapter.

Judges judge of course, and Wilhelm's initial characterization of A is a psychological judgment of A's inability to commit even to choose among alternatives. A buys experience cheaply, doing little except observing life, passing by at a distance for purposes of his personal delectation. To that extent he cannot truly *act*. The judge believes that he can bring A to see this as a root problem by appealing to what he, the judge, sees as an overlap in his and A's concerns: *love*. The judge's communication to A contains strategies meant to convert him to the ethical outlook by drawing a conceptual line between erotic and marital love. But even if the judge is correct that A yearns for a love he is unable to experience, even if he is also correct that marital love preserves erotic love in a higher form that intensifies just what A yearns for, the judge's own version of that love does not go far enough to accommodate A. This end is achieved, if it is achieved at all, in the sermon that concludes B's papers, which B (now himself as a kind of 'editor') includes there but does not author and

which he professes not to understand.⁷⁷ The sermon goes past what is presented as the ethical sphere in *Either—Or*, occupying in advance the place of humor as a *confinium*.

Wilhelm insists that it is false to view romantic love and marriage as incompatible, as the aesthete does. Romantic love is most vivid in marriage, for just the reason that A found initially attractive and self-empowering in the seduction: reflection heightens love. Wilhelm holds (and A wants to deny) that reflection requires dialogue and that dialogue promotes greater reflective development than the aesthete is capable of. That is, the combination of dialogue and love makes love more aesthetic by making it more ethical. The suppressed premise of the judge's argument here—and it is one that the aesthete is free to deny, one might hold—is that the marital partner's depth is 'infinite'—essentially, that marital commitment provides the most fertile ground for the rotation method. This is a claim about the nature of freedom; if we reconstruct the judge's first letter charitably, his assumption is that A must share this view on freedom. A does view freedom as requiring 'infinity' in the sense that A takes himself to be free to the extent that he can always find another exercise for his imagination; infinity there is a property of A's own action relative to an 'occasion' that itself is only derivatively infinite: it prompts further imaginative reconstruction. In order to be 'infinitely' reconstructed the object ultimately must not constrain the reconstruction. The 'Diary of the Seducer' complicates this picture, for it suggests that, at a certain point of advanced reflective development, the aesthete requires an object of such complexity, one that itself is on the threshold of freedom. This enables greater potential mastery, but only up to a tipping point where the object's demands block imaginative assimilation. So, the judge has good dialectical reasons for pressing his claim that the reflective aesthete is on the verge of accepting mutual dialogue as constitutive of greater reflective erotic power. (But, as we shall see below, this does not entail that the judge is right that these could be reasons *for A*, or for any other aesthete for that matter.)

A's mistake, then, according to the judge, is to see courtship leading up to the committed love of marriage as necessarily opposed to erotic love. If one makes this mistake, committed love must appear as needy, as a subordination of one's will to the will of another. Marital love is the absence of neediness, however, at least where one loves another by not needing that other to be as one wants and where one is treated likewise.⁷⁸ Marital love requires the strength to let the other person be herself

⁷⁷ E—O 2: 337–8/SKS 3: 317–18; cf. FT 37/SKS 4: 132, where Silentio admits that he can only 'describe' (*beskrive*) what Abraham does, not understand it.

⁷⁸ E—O 2: 32/SKS 3: 40.

in the utmost, and that being in the utmost can involve a great deal of change on that person's part. One loves one's spouse in this sense insofar as one remains committed enough to her to take whatever comes as a gift. To the judge's credit, in its emphasis on not submerging one's spouse in conventional expectations, this is a progressive idea of marriage for the time. Ibsen would have approved. And from the judge's point of view the potential appeal of this way of thinking about marriage to the aesthete is clear: if marital dialogue and dependence on the spouse does not consist in a compromise of individuality, then one of the main concerns of the aesthete seems to be met. But this way of putting things exposes a potential problem as well: why doesn't this conception of marriage collapse back into aestheticism, where two people are together because, for the time being at least, they find one another 'interesting'? Where is the ethical stability in that?

The text provides no straightforward answer to these questions. But when one places *Either—Or* alongside *Philosophical Crumbs* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* answers would seem to lie in Kierkegaard's more general theory of subjectivity. In order to preserve the train of explication, we will have to advance breakneck to the main point. Standard accounts of subjectivity in modern philosophy accord autonomy or other forms of self-determination constitutive roles in experience. To be a subject at all is to be in a self-relation of one or several allegedly basic sorts. For the aesthete, for example, the relation in question involves the pure spontaneity of thought; one is a subject to the extent that one collects oneself around synthesis, around taking the world as material for continual reconstruction in thought. For the judge, one is a subject to the extent that one freely endorses universal norms provided either by 'pure practical' (Kant), 'conscientious' (Fichte), or 'historical' (Hegel) reason. Kierkegaard's view is that these accounts, and others like them, that arrogate to subjects the grounds for their own subjectivity explain non-basic features of subjectivity at best. To be a subject for Kierkegaard ultimately involves dependence on and determination by something that is radically non-subjective and not subject-like, i.e. God. So it is apparent that, whatever else must be said about the changes necessary on the part of the aesthete in order to see the judge's point that marriage involves both commitment and individuality, seeing this will require the aesthete to become a truly *different kind of subject* from what he is. One would need to become a subject who could be unified around the idea that freedom *from* needing another could bind one *to* him or her. The question then becomes: what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for the possibility of that sort of subject? To be free for A is to be free from others. For the judge, freedom is freedom from dependence on others but not from them *tout court*. Marriage is the condition, relative to love, that enables the former without requiring the latter.

To be such a subject, the judge and Kierkegaard suggest, is to be radically open to and invested in the power of others over one, as well as to the contingencies of the world that may influence the exercise of that power. It is an ethical form of faith—not belief *that* a person will do this or that for one out of love, but a belief *in* the person to have grace towards one. The incipient religious element is not fortuitous, of course. The judge holds that the motivation to stay in this structure is religious after all, i.e. the idea of marriage *under God*.⁷⁹ We shall not linger on this idea here, but there are two things to note. First, what the judge ultimately intends here is not that God's invocation at the marriage ceremony invests it with the right ethical substance—that the blessing of God is a moral imprimatur. It is rather that the idea of relation to God—as Kierkegaard understands that relation, as to a creator who is at the same time closest and most 'other' to one—*both* provides an imperfect form for grace, one that can express the religious concept only ethically, *and* an anticipation within the sphere of the human of the relation of grace that Kierkegaard takes to define religious subjectivity. Second, this provides a form of hope, not based in rational expectation, that one's needs are met without being needy. The basis for such hope cannot be demonstrated, as Leibniz thought, nor is it an indemonstrable yet rational posit, as Kant held it to be. It is an article of faith not at all responsive to reason.

The second letter opens with a pedantic observation on a bit of Latin. The judge considers a Latin gloss of the Danish 'enten—eller' and concludes that a construction that contains only one 'aut' is insufficient to capture the force of the Danish. One must instead deploy the construction 'aut... aut'.⁸⁰ Regardless of the correctness of the grammatical claim, the judge's substantive point is familiar: choice involves exclusion of possibility in favor of actuality.⁸¹ If I choose to do a thing, not only do I choose to forgo the possibility of not doing it, or of doing its opposite, but I also foreclose possibilities inferentially and pragmatically inconsistent with my choice. When choosing in especially pressing circumstances I might even be aware of these things, e.g. choosing to become a philosophy professor rather than to continue to be a musician. By extension, to be ethical I choose not only the 'right' course of action over and against other possible courses; if my ethical theory holds that choice or its basis is constitutive of the ethical self, then my choice so limits *me* by exclusion. Choice involves *renunciation*;

⁷⁹ E—O 2: 101/SKS 3: 102–3.

⁸⁰ E—O 2: 157–8/SKS 3: 155–6.

⁸¹ The grammatical claim is overstated. Latin contains three basic constructions that have the logical form of disjunction. 'Aut' indicates exclusion of the alternative, e.g. 'cut my hair long or short'. One needn't employ a second 'aut', although the parallel structure is usually present. Inclusive disjunction is signified with 'vel', e.g. 'I can drink red or white wine'. When alternative names are given to the same thing, 'sive' is used, e.g. 'Deus sive natura.'

that is what 'either—or' means to the judge. But, more than that, it means 'to be ethical or not'. The connection between the two meanings of 'either—or' is that the choice to be ethical or not requires the choice to embrace a theory of *real* choice, one in which choice is defined against the background of constraint. Choice is only choice, and not just the use of the word 'choice' to mean something else, when choosing between alternatives. Does the aesthete make choices at all? The rotation method involves deliberation about whether to remain constant in, deepen, or leave one's imaginative objects. There are plenty of 'alternatives' for the aesthete: but nothing is more than a mere alternative for him. Recall the discussion of the ideal character of Don Giovanni and its function for the reflective aesthete. All aesthetes are reflective, so that the idea of a purely immediate, non-deliberative aesthete who treats nothing as an alternative to anything is a kind of aesthetic fantasy. But the ideal that guides the aesthete regardless of his station in the aesthetic sphere nevertheless radically lowers cognitive barriers to alternatives and thereby empties the concept of choice of its significance. The judge's approach to A assumes something more than just differential or deliberative thought on the part of A; he assumes that A still desires to choose aesthetically and despairs at his inability to truly choose, and thus that he, the judge, can appeal dialectically to A to take the ethical point of view seriously. But how would a mere alternative acquire the force within the aesthetic to begin to look exclusionary according to a rule? The answer will depend upon how much power despair has to alter the perspective of the aesthete. If despair is produced by the desire to be ethical coupled with a lack of the tools necessary for the task, then it might indeed lead to the ethical. But if the aesthete's despair is not focal in its disorientation, if it plunges the aesthete only deeper into the fog of nihilism, then it will not provide any inducement to become ethical. Perhaps the best that can be said on the basis of all the textual indications of the degree of overlap between the aesthetic and ethical spheres is that Kierkegaard squarely poses a question concerning the *value* of choice. For the judge, the capacity to choose between 'alternatives' in the weighty sense is infinitely valuable. Without it there can be neither an ethical sphere nor ethical subjects. For the aesthete, choice is a response to the irritant of being stuck in place, inevitable to be sure but a sign of limitation, not freedom. The aesthete must hold choice, as the judge understands that concept, to be definitively problematic. And if it might seem that the very idea of choice is kept more alive in the aesthetic than in the ethical sphere, where it is taken for granted, the judge might reply that the ethical agent occupies the higher ground just because her choices involve really giving up on alternatives in favor of determinate and defining courses of action.

The ethical sphere is bounded and unified by this conception of choice and the subjects who adopt it. Whatever is exogenous to real choice is anathema to the sphere. This is the charge against the aesthete, but the limitation of the ethical sphere relative to the religious turns on this same issue of choice. For Kierkegaard's final position is that subjects are constituted in fundamental ways that do not involve choice, but rather involve ontological dependency on God, a form of dependence that comes apart radically from any epistemic or ethical power to chart responsiveness to one of the source of dependency. There are passing indications of religious questions in other places in B's papers, but it is the unnamed pastor's 'Ultimatum' that closes *Either—Or* that intimates from within the ethical sphere its limitation by the religious.⁸² The point is made, again, in a reflection on the nature of marriage. We saw that the judge characterizes marriage as a relationship in which the spouses' dependence on one another is renounced, not in favor of isolation but as a form of unification. I take my spouse as she is come what may and the stability of the relationship rests on nothing other than our so taking one another as individuals. She may change radically in the course of the marriage, but that will not compromise my commitment to her. She may do things that are beyond my capacity for understanding or that even 'assault' it.⁸³ Of course, I will try to understand those actions on her part, perhaps even from her perspective. And I might go beyond explanations or interpretations of these actions and look for their justification. But on this picture of what constitutes true marriage, these reactions cannot be primary. To take them to be so—as basic ways to relate within marriage to my spouse—would be a category error. To make the point even more vivid, consider the following. Murderers have mothers; do mothers stop loving their murdering children because they have murdered? They may in some cases, but probably not as a rule. In fact—and this is a hard thought—one might even say that, if the judge is right (and if one allows the analogy of the marital to the parental case)⁸⁴

⁸² This section is not an 'ultimatum' in the sense of a threat; it is rather one in the stricter sense of the last thing to be said.

⁸³ Cf. Kierkegaard's gloss on the tag often attributed to Tertullian: *credo quia absurdum* (PF 52/SKS 4: 256). For the original passage in question, see *De carne Christi* V.21–6. In Tertullian the principal idea seems to be that the absurdity inherent in the Christian idea of the incarnation is an indication of the divine source of the belief. This may be because everything divine would seem absurd to humans due to a categorical deficiency of the right sort of understanding, or perhaps it is the more mundane assertion that no human would come up with such an outlandish idea and hope to convince anyone of its truth.

⁸⁴ One might not, on empirical grounds. It may be true that parents often love their children ferociously and unconditionally. Children do not seem to love their parents in this way. Spouses seldom do love one another absolutely unconditionally. But that is just grist for Kierkegaard's mill here. The point is not that such love is socially commonplace or even ethically mandated; it is, rather,

the mother loves her murderer-child not *in spite of* but *out of* his murdering. One loves what is murderous in him, as being in *him*.⁸⁵

Aesthetic and Ethical Life in the Wake of the Ironic

The ironist is an advance over the reflective aesthete of the last 'station'—i.e. Johannes—because he tries to hold, as Schlegel would put it, distance and commitment in balance. The ironist is thus in the aesthetic sphere in one way, and yet in the ethical sphere in another. Put in the terms of the dissertation, this dialectical balance between the ethical and the aesthetic is what is 'controlled' about the irony. Still, the ironist is not in a position to have the ethical bind him in the way it must, i.e. without exception; if he were, he would be unable to deliver an ironic critique that might cause the aesthete to move toward the ethical. The ironist does not experience the ethical as binding *on him*; he experiences it as it is translated into the terms of the last stages of the aesthetic sphere. The ironist goes as far as one can, that is, to be open to the ethical while remaining aesthetic, just as one would expect of a *confinium*. He reveals the aesthete's pretense of so standing outside of convention as to render any convention *merely* conventional and immaterial. But irony does not leave it there, for it brings this pretense under ironic scrutiny by balancing it with the impetus for commitment. Irony may define the limitation of the aesthetic in a way that appears merely negative to one outside its practice, but it does so in terms that open the door to being ethical.

But precisely how is that door opened? For Kierkegaard the passage from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere has as a precondition the ability to *imagine* oneself as being in another form of life in such a way that the new form 'holds sway'. One must gloss 'holding sway' in this context as something less stringent than placing a demand. For something to 'hold sway' is for it to persist as an imaginative object that, by dint of the increasing hold it has on one in despair, presents itself as rich imaginative ground—as in essence an extension of the intensive variety of crop rotation. This does not happen through argument (although arguments may have sideways effects, pro and con, on the power of the imaginative construct). It is rather a function of the increasing investment one might have in projecting

that such love completely trumps those evaluative contexts. The idea that spouses so love one another is harder than the parental case, and all the more revelatory of how sharp Kierkegaard takes the break between ethics and religion to be.

⁸⁵ Some of Lars von Trier's films, for instance *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), inhabit this idea. One might think of the particular way that they are 'excessive'—a common reaction to von Trier's films—as a conjunction of the ultra-realist techniques of the manifesto Dogme95 and Kierkegaardian theater.

oneself into a form of life to the point that the form begins to bleed into one's own. There is no guarantee that this point will be reached and, on this interpretation of how irony aids transition from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere, it is no use to *argue* to the recalcitrant that they should reach it. It either sticks or it does not. It is crucial that the ironist *both* enforce distance from *and* commit to views or actions that hold sway over him, while maintaining substantial interaction with other ways of taking the world to be meaningful. As we saw in discussion of the hermeneutic thrust of Schlegel's thought, it is not enough to posit hypothetical alternative ways of being or to play armchair anthropologist. The result of the encounter with what is otherwise possible may be to increase commitment or loosen it, but it must have real impact. That is, one must bring the imagined element with all of its attractions and repulsions back with one in ways that preserve the tension between it and one's own perspective on things. It is not for nothing that, in discussing the religious sphere, Kierkegaard holds not only that humans can live *with* 'paradox' but that, at least with one such paradox, we are fully human only if we live *by* it. The balance between irony's two poles is the aesthetic surrogate of just this constitutive capacity of humans to reach most deeply into their natures when they find themselves in the throes of paradox. Humor, which we shall consider later, also has this structure relative to the transition from ethics to religiosity.

One must contrast this structure and style, which has irony at its frontier, with that of the second volume. There, Judge Wilhelm writes a series of letters, by their very nature *direct*, in which he attempts to convince A to leave off the never-ending search for meaning in reflection for reflection's sake and embrace the concept of ethical duty. The judge's strategy is to leverage ethically what he takes to be shared ground between A and himself, the idea of love. As we have suggested, one cannot be convinced by means of argument to pass from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere, no matter how tattered and world-worn the aesthetic life has become to one.⁸⁶ If the aesthetic is still in force—if its central categories of immediacy and freedom in sheer spontaneity still control general outlook, even if not perfectly and at all times—ethical *demand* remains an ineffective form of communication, at least until irony has saturated the aesthete's imagination with a fiction in which demands of these sorts play roles. So, whether the Judge's letters to A refute the aesthetic outlook or whether they *should* appeal to A is beside the point; the issue is whether the arguments can be attractive to someone at the ironic limits of the aesthetic mode of life. On the interpretation on offer, Kierkegaard is not only or even primarily interested in

⁸⁶ Arguments might work *rhetorically* to that effect of course, but that is not what is at issue.

the soundness of the judge's responses; because the judge does not make use of the *confinium* of irony, he cannot reach the aesthete on the aesthete's own terms. This is true even if the aesthete is ironic, even if he is at that last vestigial stage of the aesthetic where despair and an anticipation of the ethical are most present to him. One of the ironic outcomes of the book is that it is Victor Eremita, the made-up editor of the two volumes, in whom the ironic potential of *Either—Or* is seated as a general matter. By placing the two volumes side by side, rather than by reducing one to the other in a rank order, Eremita keeps his distance from both ethics and irony in a way that an ironist might.⁸⁷

Spheres of Existence III: The Religious

Either—Or does not discuss the religious sphere in earnest, but as we mentioned it does contain in the pastor's 'Ultimatum' an important potential qualification on the self-standing authority of the ethical. The pastor writes that '[i]n relation to God we are always in the wrong', a thought that is supposed to be 'upbuilding', i.e. edifying and a source of personal progression.⁸⁸ One might think that the pastor means by being 'always in the wrong' that humans are by their very nature fallible, capable by nature of various and numerous specific mistakes, whereas God is not. But this is not the point; rather, 'the wrong' that humans inhabit is an ontological domain. In such a realm one might well make few mistakes in one's life; one might constantly improve one's deliberation and intuition and make fewer still. But one would still *be* in the wrong. For finite beings what is real is given; such beings do not create the universe, and there is always for them a

⁸⁷ E—O 2:339/SKS 3: 320. At this point, it is worth revisiting the book's frame narrative. What ends up being the book starts out as a bundle of papers that Victor discovers in a drawer of an old secretary. Eremita passes an antique shop, sees the desk and is so taken with it that he structures his daily walks just to be able to see it in the window. He is unable to say just what it is that is so fascinating about the desk; it is of older make and well used but not aesthetically remarkable. He develops (unspecified) fantasies about the desk and, after an unsuccessful attempt to buy it at discount, pays full price, vowing to himself that this extravagance—he has no need for a new desk—will be repaid because the purchase of the desk will, he hopes, inaugurate a new period of his life. He moves the desk into his apartment and first relives his distanced window-shopping experience by walking back and forth in front of his apartment window, gazing at it from the outside. Then, on the day of a trip and in a rush to find travelling money, Victor attempts to open its stuck money drawer. He finally has to force the drawer with a hatchet, and in doing so inadvertently trips a secret door, which reveals the papers inside. He arranges them into the A and B sets, with some loose aphorisms whose author is unknown. One of the most striking aspects of the framing device is that it gains in effect as one moves through A's papers. The very act that eventuates in the presence of the desk in Eremita's apartment is a product of just the sort of fanaticizing window shopping and promenading that fill up the early part of the Diary. We understand the first through the last.

⁸⁸ Cf. Constantius' presentation of Job as 'in the wrong before God' (R 212/SKS 4: 79).

potential gap between what is and what seems to be. It is, therefore, constitutive of such finite beings that they are ‘in the wrong’ in the pastor’s sense of the phrase.⁸⁹ Even with the very best in intent, effort, and knowledge such beings are separated from ‘the right’. The connection with marital acceptance—the principle the judge states but for which he only has testimonial warrant flowing from the pastor—is that taking one’s spouse come what may is an ethical surrogate of the right in the realm of the wrong, a point mentioned above in passing.⁹⁰ What is most divine in humans is neither Kantian pure reason nor Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*; it is, rather, what exceeds finite comprehension, what even may confound or offend.

Kierkegaard’s account of religiosity is developed in three main works, *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Crumbs*, and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Because the emphasis of this chapter is on how irony and humor develop within the context of the doctrine of the spheres of existence, we shall deal directly with those passages of these works that shed most light on that topic. And, although it is perhaps prosaic to do so, we shall start with the distinction within the religious sphere between Religiousness A and Religiousness B that Kierkegaard deploys under his pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Religiousness A designates in the *Postscript* what the *Crumbs* call ‘Socratic’ religiosity, characterized by ‘hidden inwardness’⁹¹ (*Inderlighed/Inderliggjørelse*) or, in the language of *Fear and Trembling*, ‘infinite resignation’.⁹²

The basic material that the religious agent works with is suffering or, better, suffering that outstrips ethical rationalization. Suffering (*Lidelse*) is resignation experienced concretely; one always suffers, for one is always in some sense resigned and experiencing that fact. The basic reversal of what Kierkegaard takes to be the main attitude toward religion in modern philosophy is that, the further one goes ‘inward’, the further one progresses through the religious sphere, i.e. the more one accepts that the basic constitutive human act, far from being an act of rationality that unifies the world in a way that conjoins happiness and

⁸⁹ On the assumption that such beings are ‘fallen’ in the biblical sense, an issue we return to below when discussing the concept of sin in Kierkegaard. This idea that mistake is not a deviation from human being but a proper part of it goes hand in glove with another idea at the center of Kierkegaard’s thought: that thinking of the possibility of mistakes as what separates humans from God is to improperly assign to God the status of a terminus to a *continuum* that includes humans as an incrementally deficient case.

⁹⁰ The status of testimonial evidence in the religious context is of course a fraught issue with Kierkegaard. It figures especially in his treatment of the relative merits of ‘first-hand’ and ‘second-hand’ ‘followers’ in the *Crumbs*. See PF 55–71/SKS 4: 258–71.

⁹¹ See CUP 498–512/SKS 7: 452–64, cf. the discussion of ‘inwardness’ (*Innerlighed/Innigheit*) in Hegel, above in chapter two.

⁹² FT 38–42/SKS 4: 130–7.

moral virtue, is an act of sin that fragments the world. Human agency can never, on Kierkegaard's view, put these pieces back together; the best that humans can do is to prepare themselves as subjects to be forgiven. So, an increased sense that finite capabilities are constitutive of subjectivity and thus of the world is precisely *not* an increase of inwardness for Kierkegaard; it is vanity. The inwardness to be developed is, rather, 'hidden', and in two senses. First, its development will not register in terms of external social or ethical criteria. This is not because one should not heed such criteria, but simply because inwardness develops toward an end wholly internal and particular to it. One of the main topics of discussion in the *Postscript* and the *Philosophical Crumbs* is the difficulty in preventing ethical senses of inwardness from infiltrating the depths of religious ones. Just as one in the ethical sphere has great difficulty integrating aesthetic elements into his ethical self-understanding without their taking over (irony, as we saw, is a key component of this 'therapy'), so the religious subject finds it tempting to map the frightening and foreign terrain he traverses in ethical terms. Second, the inwardness is intentionally 'hidden' *from* others. Kierkegaard raises significant questions about what a society of the truly religious would be like—in fact, it is not clear by his lights that there could be one. But the main point at issue is that, because it is so difficult not to think of oneself as basically ethical once one submits to the ethical sphere in full, one must carefully shield one's attempts to disengage from the retroactive effects of its primary form of agency—judgment. Judgment will attempt to assimilate religious conceptions of suffering to ethical categories of the same, undercutting whatever religious progress one has made. On Kierkegaard's account of it, becoming inward is inherently isolating and personal—it is done 'in secret' (*i Løndom*)—and that it is so is something best kept to oneself.⁹³

'Resignation' is a trickier concept to use to describe the state of the subject in Religiousness A. The Knight of Infinite Resignation in *Fear and Trembling* is an exemplar of one who has given up everything, i.e. he resigns the most precious things to him in the world and resigns himself to having resigned them, without expecting to receive any of them back (since otherwise, on this view, the resignation would be only temporary and not 'infinite').⁹⁴ Kierkegaard calls this type 'tragic'.⁹⁵ Such a knight loses and keenly feels the loss as a *sacrifice*. Key here is the implication that, in not expecting back what he has given up, what he has sacrificed in his movement toward God or the gods, the Knight of Infinite Resignation remains beholden to a conception of the infinite that is rendered

⁹³ FT 120/SKS 5: 108. Reference is to Matthew 6:6, where prayer is offered in intense privacy to God, who knows in secrecy what one has in secrecy done and thought.

⁹⁴ FT 38, 46–8/SKS 4: 133, 140–2.

⁹⁵ FT 34/SKS 4: 129–30.

in finite terms—in terms of universality in the ethical sphere. The Knight gives up a conditioned good for the sake of an unconditioned one. The quite reasonable equation of infinite resignation with not ever receiving back still obeys the laws of the finite realm in which the equation holds: he gives himself over to the ‘next’ world only by, and only *as*, resigning the things of this world in a kind of exchange. The main point here is that this is compatible with the description of Religiousness A as ‘hidden inwardness’. The burden imposed on the Knight is radically his, since what he has sacrificed is his beloved. One constitutes oneself in terms of sacrifice so understood, coming to hold the sacrifice to be as dear to one as what was sacrificed. The connecting point is that, although Religiousness A goes some distance in recognizing that suffering outstrips the capacity of ethical reasoning to bear it, it can still only deploy ethical categories to indicate the shortfall.

Religiousness A, then, is a form of religiosity that is at least marginally captive to ethics; it may not fall into what Kierkegaard thinks is the trap of idealism and wholly assimilate religious categories to ethical ones, but it still allows the pull of the ethical sphere to inform its conception of what is possible for faith. This lends it its specific form of guilt; someone who is religious in this sense cannot bring herself to renounce the finite context sufficiently—she loves her suffering and loves God through it. Still, Religiousness A is willing to sacrifice everything to something outside of all finite contexts. It has the correct ‘pathos’, as Kierkegaard puts it,⁹⁶ and that can form a link with the second sort of religiosity, Religiousness B. This latter form is truly and uniquely Christian religiosity according to Kierkegaard, a specification of the first kind of religiosity with the differentiating additional element of an advanced experience of the nature of sin.⁹⁷ This advanced experience is constituted by driving into oneself as deeply as possible a structure that defeats *any* idea that *any* human capacities for self-integration, *any* form of synthesis that delivers unity, can fully determine oneself as a self. Kierkegaard’s basic claim is perhaps his most famous: that only a rationally insoluble probe that presents itself in experience over and against human integrative practices and, yet, also as an organizing principle, can signify such a structure, i.e. *paradox*.

⁹⁶ See discussion later in this chapter.

⁹⁷ Kierkegaard writes that Religiousness A is not Christian (CUP 555–6/SKS 7: 505). He means two things thereby. First, he means by this that it is not specifically Christian. Second, he is using ‘Christian’ as a ‘congratulatory term’, as the ordinary language philosopher J. L. Austin might put it. Of course there are those whom one would describe as ‘Christian’ who are religious in an A way. In fact, Kierkegaard thinks that *is* exceptional: one is doing very well indeed as a ‘Christian’ in the descriptive sense if one is ‘tragic’, ‘infinitely resigned’, or ‘secretly inward’. Most Christians are either officious ethical beings or, slightly more interesting but even further down the register for Kierkegaard, aesthetic Christians.

Religiousness B embraces paradox as constitutive of it: that one could renounce anything, and perhaps everything, yet receive it back all the same.⁹⁸

There is often an emphasis on what is taken to be a negative cognitive dimension to the operation of paradox on the standard ways that finite subjects take their orientation in the world, i.e. through rational processes. It is easy to see why this might seem like a natural point of departure. For Kierkegaard writes that the paradox so outstrips rationality, transcending even conceivability, that it is an 'offense' to reason.⁹⁹ No doubt in Kierkegaard's view there is an impact on the vanity with which one attends to their rationality that is pulled down by the absolute paradox, but this is not the main lesson. That lesson involves not merely rational incapacity, even across the board; rather, it has to do with being shocked into recognizing the difference between two modes of subjectivity that, in turn, are relevant to two radically differing modes of human existence. The presentation of the degree to which the two forms of religiosity are continuous differs from *Fear and Trembling* and the *Postscript*. The former leaves the impression, due to a stringent application of the idea of a 'leap of faith' in the Abraham example, that there is no continuity at all. In the *Postscript* the self-understanding of Religiousness A is more volatile and permeated with suffering. It is important to allow that the perceived distance between the two knights in *Fear and Trembling* may be due to the more optimistic view there that infinite resignation can sustain life of a rewarding sort. The leading thread of the analysis in the *Postscript* is the idea of 'pathos', to which over two hundred pages of the book are devoted. Πάθος is a perfectly ordinary Greek noun that has three pertinent meanings for Kierkegaard: 'affect', 'incident', and 'condition'. The key overlap of these meanings of the term is an ontological predisposition to act in certain ways relative to whatever sphere one is in. This predisposition is not brute—it is not just behavior—but rather a way of holding oneself ready to be a self relative to a sphere one is in. One then can order the main concepts with which one charts progression through the religious sphere 'pathetically', as deepening forms of awareness of the nature of holding oneself forth as a self. Resignation and suffering we have discussed above. Guilt (*Skyld*), which has a construction in Religiousness A and thus is a pathos relative to it, is the final pathetic stage.¹⁰⁰ Guilt is consciousness of how and why one suffers and of whose fault that is. Kierkegaard's basic claim in the *Postscript* is that Religiousness A expresses only a superficial pathos of guilt. In Religiousness B guilt becomes the controlling pathos and retrospectively translates resignation and suffering into its own terms. Resignation under this translation becomes a matter of always

⁹⁸ Cf. discussion of 'repetition' in note 35, this chapter.

⁹⁹ FT 50–1/SKS 5: 47–8.

¹⁰⁰ CUP 527/SKS 7: 478–9.

keeping an honest assessment of one's relation to God central to one's life. Because one's life is in the finite and that which conditions the resignation is infinite, this creates a dialectical tension that gives the pathos its dynamic quality. The better one's understanding of the infinite in terms of which one resigns, the more one feels this tension and the more passionate one becomes. The same is true of suffering, with a crucial modification. One suffers because one is sundered from God; that is, one has to enter into a state of resignation within the finite to indirectly relate to God. As a pathos, then, suffering is more ontologically basic and general than is resignation, the latter being a proper part of the former. Subjectively inward intensification by means of suffering is as far as Religiousness A can go. For Religiousness A, guilt too must be thought in terms that force a kind of 'contradiction', between it and absolute happiness. Religiousness B's understanding of guilt is deepened by application of a specifically Christian doctrine: the crucifixion. This does not 'solve' or sublimate the contradiction forced on Religiousness A, but rather dissolves the very call for a solution. This is where Kierkegaard reformulates the Christian doctrine of sin. Sin is the beginning of history in the sense that it is the first sin of Adam and Eve that sunders humans from paradise and makes them subject to temporality and to understanding the world in postlapsarian, i.e. historical, ways. But it is not until the two orders that result from that sin are brought together again through the worldly incarnation and crucifixion of a teacher who is simultaneously fully infinite and fully finite that it is possible to think sin in all of its implications *through sin*. This gives rise to the 'Absolute Paradox', in which two ontological realms whose very natures require them to be fully separate—two contradictory realms—are forced together, ontological domains that originated from the initial sundering by the primeval act of spontaneous human thought. Whereas Religiousness A can still deflect sin, suffering and guilt by holding out hope for happiness *earned* by sacrifice, Religiousness B does not do this. It lives guilt to the full 'in existence'; expiation of sin is unthinkable, and the divine order, on which all foundation depends, is strictly 'other' than human.¹⁰¹ All that can be hoped for is *unearned* intercession and tutelage through grace.¹⁰² So, the key point of opposing Religiousness A to B is not just that they are two radically different

¹⁰¹ CUP 584/SKS 7: 530.

¹⁰² Walter Benjamin's dissertation in essence waxes Kierkegaardian when he states, as we saw him doing in chapter one, that the Jena romantics were not scrupulous enough in their negative thoughts about the absolute; they allowed, according to Benjamin, for its symbolic representation by finite means. Benjamin's own view on this, so influential for Adorno, is that only allegory, with its demand for fully parallel and separate ontological structures, can fit the bill. Our interpretation of Jena romanticism denies Benjamin's charge against the romantics, but we should allow that, under most theories of symbolic representation, symbolization is too determinate for romanticism of Schlegel's kind.

species of being religious (although they are); it is rather that accepting the Absolute Paradox as constitutive of guilt cuts off a certain possibility: that one can conjoin the idea of sin with that of a completion of the activity of suffering in the vision of eternal happiness.

Climacus self-ascribes to Religiousness A, and there is a literature devoted to how ironically one should view the *Postscript* as a whole. Still, the account of religiosity in *Crumbs* and its *Postscript* can be coordinated successfully enough with other aspects of Kierkegaard's thought to yield a stable basis for discussion of the operation of humor at the boundary of the ethical and religious spheres.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ How should one understand Climacus' famous statement at the conclusion of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that his book is 'revoked' (*tilbagekaldt*)? An influential line of interpretation concludes that this statement ironically undermines the text in quite general ways. See James Conant, 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense', in *Pursuits of Reason*, ed. T. Cohen, P. Guyer, and H. Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), pp. 195–224; cf. Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). The passage in question reads:

As in Catholic books, especially those of an earlier age, one finds at the back of the volume a note that informs the reader that everything is to be understood comfortably with the doctrine of the Holy Catholic Mother Church—so what I write contains also a piece of information that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, and the book has not only a Conclusion, but [also] a Revocation. (CUP 619/SKS 7: 562)

The first thing to mark is that the book in question, the object to be revoked, is not the *Postscript*. It is rather the book that the *Postscript* is a postscript to, namely *Crumbs*. Any extension of the revocation to the *Postscript* must be either conjectural, based in an argument to the effect that the *Postscript* and *Crumbs* so overlap that what holds for the latter in this regard also holds for the former, or grounded specifically in some other textual evidence. The first strategy for enlarging the scope of the revocation to include the *Postscript* itself runs aground on the fact that there are various highly thematic and philosophically operative ways that the *Postscript* is quite different from the *Crumbs*, as we have seen. The second strategy is also not promising. There are, to my knowledge, no independent grounds for the attribution in Kierkegaard's text. 'Revocation' is also not a univocal term. One is apt to default to its legalistic meaning of something along the lines of 'nullify'. When one, for instance, revokes a will and testament, one takes it *all* back, nullifying the document revoked and thus the testamentary intent behind it. But this is not the only possibility. To revoke something can also be to simply 'call it back', a meaning which sticks closer to the Latin origin of the English word and which is also the main meaning of the Danish verb *tilbagekalde* ('to recall'). To be sure, one can call something back in order to nullify it, or perhaps, in some cases (e.g. the case of the will just mentioned), nullify it by calling it back. But there is no necessary connection running in either direction between the two concepts. On the other hand, the term 'revocation' is used by Kierkegaard to describe the effect of withdrawal into the infinite of both humor and irony, if they are deployed in a controlled way (see e.g. CUP 270–1, 447, 618/SKS 7: 245–6, 407, 561). This is of a piece with Kierkegaard's statement elsewhere that he needn't have revoked the book, since he did not claim to be its author (SKJP 376/*Papirer* X 1A 192 [1849]). But the most vexing point is conceptual: the agent of revocation is a pseudonym. This presents a dilemma for the interpretation under consideration. Pseudonyms cannot revoke books; only authors can. So, either one does not take the theory of pseudonymous authorship seriously (at least as it applies to *Crumbs* and to their *Postscript*), in which case it is possible that there is revocation of the kind claimed, or one cleaves to the theory of pseudonyms, in which case there is no revocation. The 'First and Last Explanation' (CUP 625–30/

Religion Speaks to the Ethical: Humor as a *Confinium*

Following Hegel, Kierkegaard groups irony and humor under the more general heading of ‘the comic’, an attitude that he states is ‘everywhere’ in his own work.¹⁰⁴ The comic, as one might expect, is for Kierkegaard an existential category; it is a basic mode of comporting oneself in the world, not merely an effect of what is funny or unexpected.¹⁰⁵ And, again following Hegel, Kierkegaard specifies its content in terms of an ontological contrast between ‘the finite’ and ‘the infinite’.¹⁰⁶ Humans are finite entities who cannot but experience the world in its sheer breadth as beyond their control. Yet, in a fashion traceable to Kant, finite beings of this sort also cannot avoid the thought, which vouchsafes all ethical responsibility, that they can in principle achieve enough cognitive distance from at least the thought of being ‘determined’ by the world to act on the precept that one can be one’s own originating cause. Kierkegaard, then, thinks of the comical as uniting apparently disparate ideas of how the world as a whole stands relative to human action. This way of looking at comedy has a long tradition dating back to Attic comedy. Comedy achieves its effects by combining disparate ideas to reveal underlying and surprising overlap while preserving a sense of the tenuousness of the combination. The resulting combination reflects locally a more general existential relation of finitude to infinity, as that relation is viewed from the finite perspective. Tragedy is the reverse of this structure. In it the confluence of the finite and the infinite, of what is within the range of purported human understanding and what is not, sunders the human from the whole of the world, with an effect that alternates between sublimity and existential isolation. The tragic effect follows from a felt disunity of the finite and the infinite that results when these two spheres collide. What makes Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigenia tragic is that the contrasting demands of the divine and the human cannot be incorporated in a human response that does not treat the incompatibility of the two orders as externally imposed.¹⁰⁷ In the case of the comic the two orders are present in a

SKS 7: 560–6) at the very end of the book (it is not *even* an appendix) might be taken to settle matters, since ‘S. Kierkegaard’ admits to the authorship of this and his other pseudonymous books. But that admission is a separate act from the revocation and, in my view, only serves to complicate matters. I would argue that Kierkegaard is in fact offering the interpretation according to which there is revocation as a lure. It is best to admire, not to bite.

¹⁰⁴ CUP 513–20 and n./SKS 7: 466–72 and n.

¹⁰⁵ CUP 519 n./SKS 7: 470 n.; see also R 204/SKS 4: 72, where Constantius forwards Job as inhabiting a *confinium*, one that must be by implication humor.

¹⁰⁶ CUP 517ff./SKS 7: 468ff.

¹⁰⁷ See FT 58–9/SKS 4: 152–3. Agamemnon can talk about his choice—even about being a Knight of Infinite Resignation—with others, and one can write a poem or play to communicate his tragedy. What *art* would be appropriate to the ontological status of the Knight of Faith?

human response that takes that tension 'to heart', i.e. that accepts the tension as part and parcel of being human.

Because *confinia* mark points of departure from sphere to sphere, and because the spheres in question have quite different characters, it is not a given that *confinia* should have one neutral, shared form or structure. One of the ways that Kierkegaard's account of transition between spheres is markedly non-Hegelian is that the mechanics of transition between spheres may vary. Accordingly, it cannot be taken for granted that there is a single account of *confinia* that can be imported without modification from the aesthetic-ethical context into the ethical-religious. And on the face of it, the change from the ethical to the religious sphere seems to be qualitatively quite different than the change from the aesthetic to the ethical. Put in simple terms: to go from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere is to give up a mere imaginative projection of a life of reason for a form of life in which not only reason but universal conceptions of reason are constitutive. To go from the ethical sphere to the religious is, in a way, to reverse this direction. One gives up one's basic existential orientation in universal reason in favor of the practice of faith centered on a singular 'call' from God that is necessarily not subject to the epistemic or ethical canons of explanation or justification. This call may run as contrary to the mandate of universal ethical reason as would the whim of the aesthete. In a stunning modification of the Kantian picture according to which the experience of moral law is conditioned by the possibility that doing one's duty might be contrary to even very deep-seated inclination, Kierkegaard suggests that there exists a realm of human action in which just this possibility of discord between the moral law and singular yet non-inclinal human choice constitutes the experience of the religious. For Kant one resolves the tension when one *submits* to the moral law, choosing to do one's duty out of duty. For Kant 'holy wills' are mere ideals for finite discursive moral agents; no one has a holy will and moral choice will always contain the possibility of struggle against inclination. For Kierkegaard it is possible for humans, and necessary for the highest form of religiosity, that they will leave ethical discord in its place as discordant when they act out of religious conviction. The status of humans in such religious spheres is constituted by another form of discord, which Kierkegaard views as more ontologically constitutive than the Kantian discord between law and inclination.¹⁰⁸ The discord here is between creator and created,

¹⁰⁸ This is not to say, of course, that the impact of the inclination-duty relation on agency in Kant is not metaphysical or even ontological. It involves various aspects of his view concerning supersensible entities and processes. But Kant deploys also various sorts of idealization that cushion against the outright assertion of the unqualified reality of these entities and processes. This is precisely what Kierkegaard eschews.

i.e. between the infinite and the finite *in being*. The idea of conforming oneself to a law, even if one attempts to construe the nature of that law as being super-sensible, is beside the point. Accordingly, no matter how Kantian or Hegelian the specifics of Kierkegaard's ethical theory may turn out to be, there is no gainsaying that this way of conceiving of the existential priority of religion over ethics is fundamentally at odds with the main currents in German idealism.¹⁰⁹

This picture raises rather substantial questions concerning how faith might be imperfectly exemplary at the limits of the ethical, giving a sideways glance into the 'fate' of the ethical in the wake of the religious. When Kierkegaard speaks of humor as a *confinium* he usually expresses himself in a metaphysical register and in ways recognizable from his treatment of irony. One can capture the contrast between humor and irony as *confinia* in short form at a first pass. Irony registers the inadequacy of the external world relative to the demand of subjective spontaneity, where the spontaneity in question is unhinged from the fixity of self that the paradigm of freedom as self-determination typically implies. Global irony is the aesthetic perspective operating at its limit. Humor marks the inadequacy of the subjective internal world, where spontaneous self-determination according to moral laws structures that world, to the externality of having been created. As we have noted, the central categories of the religious sphere are 'resignation', 'suffering', 'guilt', and 'sin'. In discussing the religious nature of humor, it pays to concentrate on its connection to the most comprehensive existential component of the religious sphere overall, i.e. suffering. Suffering is present in all the spheres of existence; it is not exclusively a phenomenon of the *religious sphere*. That said, it is in other spheres proleptically religious and only receives its full expression when religiosity is expressly in question. So, a primary marker of the religious sphere is the attitude towards suffering taken by religious agents thinking of their agency *qua* religious agency. Contrast the aesthete: he experiences suffering as 'contingent', in two senses. First, the attitude of the aesthete toward his own agency when something 'goes wrong' is passive. Because volition is a good unto itself for the aesthete, 'things not working out' in the world are experienced merely as unlucky 'occurrences'; he merely 'undergoes' what has 'befallen' him. Second, he attempts to escape suffering through the radical contingency of his own subjectivity. In essence, he attempts through thought to enforce an isomorphism between two contingent orders: that of thought *qua* radical spontaneity and that of the world *qua* fate. Suffering is thus for the most part unnoticed as such by the

¹⁰⁹ Our treatment of this issue differs substantially from the view set out in Robert Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation: Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 216–19.

aesthetic agent and, as Kierkegaard puts it, remains 'inessential' to the aesthetic sphere until irony sets to work. Ethical suffering is the experience of the mismatch between even the best ethical intents and a recalcitrant world, of the fact that even the greatest virtue does not ensure the least happiness. Ethical sufferers are cognizant of their suffering; irony in effect has done its work at the outset of that sphere and established the right kind of critical distance on one's inclinations and passions. But irony is also discharged—or is sought to be discharged—in the ethical sphere, and bides its time until its reanimation as humor. Ethical sufferers attempt to control their suffering by reflecting on it in a manner reminiscent of Kant: one gives suffering meaning as compensated for by the purported self-constituting force of the moral law, thereby relegating suffering to a secondary status. Religious sufferers also reflect on their suffering, but they differ from ethical sufferers in their approach. Religious agents do not think of suffering as something that one might transcend even in principle. Suffering is therefore constitutive of the religious sphere in a way it cannot be for ethics. To *be* religious is to *be* suffering; and, in a certain sense, not to want to suffer is not to want to be religious.¹¹⁰ Crucially, then, both the aesthetic and ethical spheres in their different ways attempt to wish away suffering, either by all but canceling out the concept or by allowing for human transcendence of suffering in principle.¹¹¹ To the religious mind, by contrast, to suffer is to acknowledge the constitutive ontological distance from God, a distance that can never be closed through human action, even if only 'in thought'. This understanding of the ineradicable nature of suffering is common coin to both main forms of religiosity. Religiousness A allows that there is such a gap and drives the gap as deeply as possible into the inward structure of self-understanding. For religiousness B the basis for the gap is sin, which adds to the idea of being apart from God the further idea that the gap is due to a wanton human act, i.e. the Fall and the resulting need for the Absolute Paradox. Moving from the ethical to the religious sphere thus involves a reorientation of one's entire life in terms of an organizing principle of suffering.

Humor marks the beginning of such reorientation, a means by which this transfer of attitudes concerning the nature of suffering is readied. Climacus states that humor may be a precursor to 'true' Christianity, even though it 'falsifies' Christian truth if it uses Christian categories.¹¹² This implies that humor itself

¹¹⁰ Cf. CUP 436–7/SKS 7: 396–7.

¹¹¹ For Kant, such transcendence is by means of those regulative ideal principles that are necessary for reason to adopt, for Hegel transcendence is promised by the completion of the progressive series of forms of reason. Kierkegaard denies either form of transcendence and views them as (falsely) compensatory.

¹¹² CUP 271–2/SKS 7: 246–7.

need not be specifically Christian in character.¹¹³ In keeping with its status as a *confinium*, humor incorporates some of the limitations of the ethical sphere, but with a slightly retrospective and a more global cast where suffering is concerned. It also involves a prospective, indirect imaginative ingress into the beginnings of the religious. For Kierkegaard the ethical sphere is not as volatile as its aesthetic counterpart; rather, what it lacks relative to the religious sphere is resignation, guilt, and finally, faith. The pretense of the ethical is to take self-constitution through norms as exhausting the structure of subjectivity to the exclusion of these further existential modalities. Humor consists in the ability of the sufferer to treat herself, her power of imagination, and her wish for transcendence with a somewhat distanced, knowing kindness. The desire to be free from suffering, either through its transcendence or by treating it as accidental, is the ethical subject matter of humor. But while the humorist sees the desire to transcend suffering as illusory, he still finds it an unavoidable aspect of the self-regard of finite, ethical subjects, and his humor deflects but does not submerge this necessity. Humor requires precisely this misdirection, what Kierkegaard sometimes refers to as its 'deceptiveness', for its effect. In humor suffering is presented as inescapable, and the very idea that it could be escaped is comic, on the order of a human being trying not to be a human at all. The humorist's actions in this regard are limited to the inwardness that is definitive of Religiousness A. In the guise of the humorist, the inhabitant of Religiousness A retraces her steps into that form of life, re-enacting and strengthening them in a way, guarding her inwardness just as the incognito ironist guards his form of subjectivity in the use of irony. What the humorist *cannot* do, separating her from Religiousness B, is to reflect on suffering as *sin*. 'Reflect' here has an extended sense; it is neither the aesthete's idea of transient intellectual or sensual power nor the ethical agent's conception of reflective endorsement of principles. It means, rather, embracing the idea that suffering is inalienable and viewing one's life as organized around the basic ontological cause of suffering, sundering from God, and what it is to truly be a subject as a result of that sundering. The structure is twofold. First, there is no transition by means of humor from Religiousness A to B. And that

¹¹³ See Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, pp. 108–9 for the textual bases in Christian writings for Kierkegaard's understanding of humor. Climacus at times speaks of humor as a *confinium* between the ethical and the dawning of the religious, Religiousness A (CUP 291–2/SKS 7: 265–7); at other times he states that it is 'Christian', implying a connection to Religiousness B (CUP 272–3/SKS 7: 248–9). I do not consider this to be problematic. Since Religiousness A overlaps considerably with B, humor could be a *confinium* relative to the shared structure, i.e. to A as to the whole of its structure and to B as to a good deal of it. Cf. the interesting remarks on this topic in Gregor Malantchuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 334–5.

means, secondly, that there is no incognito use of humor from within Religiousness B. This follows from the basic principle of Kierkegaard's ontology that 'subjects' in the deepest sense of the term are constituted by being created by an agency radically 'other' than them and then relate back to their created status through grace beyond expectation. Consciousness of sin, which is definitive of Religiousness B, is the precondition for acknowledging the constitutive power, radically outside subjective control, of the Absolute Paradox. Humor's focus is, rather, on the 'teleological suspension of the ethical' in a form still controlled by the idea that subjectivity is in the purview of subjects—i.e. inwardness and suffering understood as ethical bounds. As Religiousness B approaches, or as it comes and goes, humor comes into and passes out of human capacity: it 'continually disappears'.¹¹⁴ Of course, inwardness is also present, reformulated in terms of consciousness of sin, in Religiousness B, and so humor as a transitional point can contain a form of self-regard that is still pertinent there. But Kierkegaard holds that sin and guilt so override the understanding of the meaning of inwardness on the part of the religious agent that humor can no longer operate as an adequate means to reflect on subjectivity.¹¹⁵ In the face of sin the indirection of humor must rather take on its final form: relation to the 'other' that is God.¹¹⁶

Humor also serves to buffer its practitioner and audience from less resolute (and therefore more tempting) forms of religiosity, preserving and deepening the inward orientation toward suffering as inalienable. Even if all humans suffer by definition because they are creatures in sin, each suffers in her own way, and this *personal* experience of suffering is the essence of religious inwardness for Kierkegaard. Humor poses the meaning of suffering as a standing problem for each person, who thereby further internalizes her inalienable suffering and achieves distance from standard modes of religiosity. Humor is perhaps not as subjectively isolating as is irony, which depends on an audience of the select, and thus has a more universalizing character on balance with its personal appeal. Humor unites its audience in a way that does not require the potentially exclusionary bifurcations of irony; the unity in question allows the suffering focused by the humor to

¹¹⁴ CUP 521–2/SKS 7: 473–4.

¹¹⁵ CUP 531–8/SKS 483–8.

¹¹⁶ Like irony, humor can present what is beyond it merely negatively, by imagining a world in which transcendence of suffering is impossible through gentle examples of thwarted escape. While the humorist cannot release himself from the idea that the expiation of suffering is possible through the ethical good, he can actively enter into a frame of reference that, while inchoate, still allows him to see the fact that he is doing this, thereby at least sparing himself the delusion. That the means for this humor is 'aesthetic' in the broad sense—i.e. art—is an irony not lost on Kierkegaard. This is another indication that, far from being a defunct and discarded mode of existence, elements of the aesthetic continue to play a basic role in the ethical and the passage to the religious.

be individualized by audience members. Even if it puts their pretenses on display to them, it does so to all, for each, and in such a way that the audience laughs with the humorist.

Humor, then, works on our shared identities as co-sufferers; i.e. it works with compassion. But thinking of humor as merely an affectionate and wistful look back at humans' foibles as finite creatures—an attitude we saw in chapter two at the core of Hegel's notion of objective humor, which was well known to Kierkegaard—would be a mistake. For humor is meant to drive deeper into the ethical sphere the despair of the lack of true religiosity and unseat the smugness, not of the aesthete, but of the *moralizing* that Kierkegaard clearly reviles. Humor at once challenges the fixity and purported primacy of the ethical sphere *and* solidifies it, in its own terms. Aesthetic, ethical, and religious natures coexist in any person quite properly, so long as the right balance is struck between them. But if the aesthetic and ethical are thought to be unbounded, disequilibrium sets in. At best the ethical has fixity—that is, it is a self-sufficient and self-sustaining mode of existence—where human ethical sociability is concerned. For a Hegelian, for whom being a subject is to be finally analyzed in such terms, that is perhaps enough: both aesthetics and religion are to be analyzed in terms of social rationality. But for Kierkegaard, for whom subjectivity ultimately is made possible by a relation to what is radically neither subject nor society, that is insufficient. Even the most ethical form of human love, marriage (although it can be understood in a way that approaches the religious, as we saw), cannot comprehend a form of subjectivity that requires a relation to God as a radical non-subject.

A final point: humor's critical potential to stand outside ethics indirectly evokes the dangerous idea of a return to the aesthetic from the ethical, or of what is perhaps even more startling to one firmly ensconced in the ethical sphere, the idea that all along there has been a subterranean vein of the aesthetic running through the ethical that now emerges at the latter's limits: humor as cousin to irony. It occurs to almost every reader of *Fear and Trembling* that, regarded externally, there is little to choose from between Abraham and a would-be cult killer. At the root of the indiscernibility—what makes the indiscernibility most troubling—is that Abraham's motives are not open to psychological scrutiny.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ It is worth considering, as a point of comparison, the story of Moses and the commandments. When Moses descends Mt. Sinai with the second set of tablets in hand, his face is so radiant that the people recoil with terror, due to their own sinfulness. Moses puts on a veil in order to address them and continued to wear a veil whenever he spoke to the Israelites. Ex. 34:29, 33. Moses' radiance is said to have remained undiminished for the rest of his life. Deut. 34:7. From Kierkegaard's perspective, Paul distorts the core meaning of the episode when he interprets Moses' veil as functioning to hide the diminishment of the glory of Israel from its people. See 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29. The point of the story is that divine lawgiving is always veiled.

That is the point in *Fear and Trembling* of stepping through ways to imagine those motivations, all of which fail and lead up in their failure to the final statement of the leap of faith. But, while the aesthete may be forthcoming as a verbal matter when asked about his motives, his words do not limn his character either. Both the aesthete and the religious agent are social isolates.¹¹⁸ From within the ethical sphere, religiosity must appear to be quite dangerous, tantamount perhaps to a return to the aesthetic.¹¹⁹ However, in addition to serving as a control on ethical pretension relative to the religious, one might suggest that humor shapes the ethical to accept a new conception of subjectivity that is neither aesthetic nor ethical, although it does so by aesthetic (i.e. humorous) means. Contradiction in the aesthetic viewed under the aspect of controlled irony is the comic border between the aesthetic and ethical spheres. Humor views the comic object from the point of view of incipient religiosity. The ethical sphere is bounded, shaped at its limits, by two *confinia*, one of which readies a form of high individualism for ethical commitment, and the other of which prepares the ethical to be religious. But it is not too much to claim then that the humorous *confinium* ‘subsumes’ the ironic. While the qualitative characteristics of the two transitions are quite distinctive, it is still open to view irony and humor as combining to cumulative effect.

Excursus: Transition between Spheres

Our interpretation of Kierkegaard’s presentation of movement between spheres is a departure from the two main approaches in the secondary literature that have been taken to this question, but is closer to one than the other. The first of these approaches stresses Kierkegaard’s roots in German idealism and attempts to demonstrate that passage between the aesthetic and ethical spheres is incremental, either on the model of transcendental argumentation or of dialectic.¹²⁰ The main contention of the first line of commentary is that there are *reasons* that can be made apparent to one within the aesthetic sphere *as* one’s reasons by means of argumentation, to adopt at least the beginnings of an ethical outlook. Central to

¹¹⁸ It is significant of course that Abraham is also the ethical leader of his people, but we may take this fact only to highlight his isolation as a religious actor.

¹¹⁹ True, Kierkegaard writes that the resignation of Religiousness A is not a matter of ‘aesthetic emotion’. FT 47/SKS 4: 141. But the point is that one in the ethical sphere who is not carrying the incognito of humor may make the misidentification with an aesthete.

¹²⁰ Important examples are Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993); Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lore Hühn, *Kierkegaard und der Deutsche Idealismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); and Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation*.

this interpretation of the relation of the spheres is the claim that, the more the aesthetic sphere develops internally, the more it becomes apparent to the aesthete, first, that she is working with principles and, second, that those principles are incoherent. The first aspect is crucial: commitment to a principle is exactly what the aesthete wants to avoid as giving impetus to her acts, so if it can be shown that she presupposes one, then, on the assumption that arguments can be effective on her, she can be shown that she is not really an aesthete after all. If she can be shown that no aesthete can operate without a principle, then the aesthetic way of life as a whole is, by its own lights, not aesthetic. Finally, if she can be shown that the principle itself is incoherent, she can be moved out of the aesthetic by the two-pronged search for a principle that is more so. That is, one can move her away altogether from the desire to find a modification for her principle native to the aesthetic sphere and, so, cause her not to want to be aesthetic. Applied to the transition from the ethical to the religious sphere, the model dictates that the religious sphere contains within it ethical reasons with added 'passionate' religious elements having to do with the way or force with which principles are held. That Kierkegaard makes this interpretation available for consideration does not entail, however, that he accepts it. Indirect communication, as any reading of any of the 'aesthetic' or pseudonymous authorship must maintain, requires Kierkegaard to engage the reader through such invitations to enter into plausible but perhaps finally non-tenable understandings of one's existential situation—his 'authorship' is 'Socratic' in precisely this way. Interpretations in this line, that is, see an important asymmetry concerning the two transitions: on the one hand between the aesthetic and the ethical spheres and, on the other, between the ethical and religious spheres. In the latter case, there may be something like the famed 'leap' between spheres, but not in the former.

This brings us directly to consider the second interpretation, according to which there is no such asymmetry, in which movement from one sphere to another is across the board non-rational, i.e. a matter either of radical¹²¹

¹²¹ Jean Wahl originates this line of interpretation. Sartre and Camus join this with doctrines of radical choice. Thinking about Kierkegaard in this way often also includes concerns with the 'singularity' and temporality that follow from finitude. Sartre for instance writes:

Kierkegaard vit parce-que, refusant le savoir, il révèle la contemporanéité transhistorique des morts et des vivants, c'est-à-dire qu'il dévoile que tout homme est tout homme en tant qu'universel singulier ou, si l'on préfère, parce qu'il manifeste, contre Hegel, la temporalisation comme dimension transhistorique de l'histoire, l'humanité perd ses morts et les recommence absolument par ses vivants.

'L'universel singulier', in *Kierkegaard vivant*, ed. R. Maheu (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 61.

or arbitrary choice.¹²² Kierkegaard indicates at times that this is precisely his intent, as when he underscores that the transition from the aesthetic to ethical spheres is ‘not dialectical’ and is, instead ‘pathos-filled’.¹²³ Alasdair MacIntyre develops a version of the ‘arbitrary choice’ interpretation in work from the 1960s through *After Virtue* that is connected intimately, especially in that book, with MacIntyre’s own conception of how reasons work in full-fledged, ‘narrative’ forms of life. On MacIntyre’s interpretation ‘the doctrine of *Enten-Eller* is plainly to the effect that the principles that depict the ethical way of life are to be adopted *for no reason*, but for a choice that lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count for us as a reason’ (first emphasis supplied, second emphasis original).¹²⁴ Choice displaces reason for MacIntyre’s Kierkegaard when it comes to basic orientations, because one can only choose rationally against the background of governing criteria. Such criteria can be subject of course to questions about their justification, the answers to which will drive one deeper into the system of criteria that, taken as a whole, forms the rational backdrop to the choice. But these criteria must be grounded in something that is not itself subject to such challenge, and Kierkegaard rejects a foundationalist account of final criteria—they are established by an act of will.¹²⁵ So, when one chooses basically, as Kierkegaard casts the choice between the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence, one chooses outside

¹²² See, e.g. E—O 2: 169, 177–8/SKS 3: 165, 173. See MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), ‘Kierkegaard’, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 4: 336–40; and *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Cf. Kierkegaard’s extremely interesting remark at CUP 434 n./SKS 7: 395 n. to the effect that it is endemic to the ethical and religious spheres that they meet in ‘collision’ (*Collision*). As we saw, this is a term Kierkegaard uses in his discussion of tragedy, and in particular *Antigone*, to capture the inherent undecidability within a way of life between two competing systems of goods.

¹²³ SKJP 178/*Papirer* IV C 105 [1843]. This remark is especially revealing. There are three points to make. In the first place, saying that the transition from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere is ‘not dialectical’ hamstrings interpretations of *Either—Or* that find A being argued into B’s way of thinking. The standard reading of the character of the Judge’s ethical commitments (and thus of the nature of his argumentative arsenal) is that they are Kantian, Hegelian, or a hybrid of the two. If, as Kierkegaard says, the transition is not dialectical, that would rule out appeals to reason on the part of the Judge, which in turn supports the alternative interpretation that, with regard to reasons, the transition is importantly discontinuous. In the second place, saying that the transition is ‘pathos-filled’, as we have seen in our discussion of Religiousness B, means that the position of the agent within the given sphere is suffused only with the native resources of that sphere at its very limit. This indicates *not* a necessary emergent response to the next sphere *but rather* a certain form of openness to live differently. Last, the emphasis on pathos, a concept that figures prominently in Kierkegaard’s consideration of religious life, suggests, if not states outright, that the transition (1) from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere and (2) from the ethical sphere to the religious sphere are, with regard to the question of the abruptness of the passage, on a par.

¹²⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 41.

¹²⁵ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, p. 216; see also MacIntyre, ‘Kierkegaard’, pp. 336–40.

of reasons.¹²⁶ Put in another, complementary way: given Kierkegaard's characterization of the spheres, any reasons for the aesthete will be reasons the criteria for which are internal only to the aesthetic sphere, so that choices will be aesthetic-choices only, and the same is true for ethical reasons, the ethical sphere, and ethical-choice. So, when the judge addresses A with ethical reasons or A the judge with aesthetic reasons, they are speaking past one another. To choose between the two in any way that breaks out of this conundrum would be to judge from a third point outside the spheres, which Kierkegaard does not allow. Given our interpretation of the core doctrine of *Either—Or* we might say that, in a way, he does allow this. Then again, in a way he does not. But before saying how that is so, let us point out what is right about MacIntyre's view. In Kierkegaard's view ethical reasons could not be reasons *for an aesthete* to move from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere. Critics of MacIntyre respond that there are reasons *for one* to move from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere, and that the judge, depending on one's view about his status as an observer of the aesthetic and its relation to the ethical, gives such reasons, which the aesthete *ought* to act on. That seems right, but irrelevant. That the reasons are reasons from a third-party standpoint is not really responsive to accounts such as MacIntyre's. For that there are such reasons 'for one' that one 'ought' to act on is a different matter from the one raised: whether such reasons could operate on aesthetic agents. MacIntyre and likeminded others are free to insist that this is the real issue, with perhaps more emphasis than MacIntyre puts initially on the point. (In fact, the emphasis was there initially, which is why in the quote above we placed emphasis on the word 'depict'.)

One may suggest that there is such a basis for transition 'outside' or 'beyond' reason in Kierkegaard's theories of irony and humor. Once one imaginatively entertains in a full-blooded way the sort of reasons that have purchase within the ethical sphere—there is no barrier to this, we have taken it—and once the critical function of irony unmasks at least some of the pretensions of the aesthetic, it can dawn on one that there is a way of life involving such reasons. In what is still the most searching commentary on Kierkegaard, Robert Denoon Cumming puts the matter in terms of what he (and Kierkegaard) calls a 'starting point':¹²⁷

¹²⁶ MacIntyre, *A Short History* offers this interpretation as applicable to both the transition between the aesthetic and ethical spheres (p. 216) and that between the ethical and religious spheres (p. 218).

¹²⁷ *Starting Point* pp. 46–7, citing *Papirer*, V A70 [1844]. Cf. the following statement:

I called the work *Either—Or* and tried in the preface to explain the meaning of the title. After familiarizing myself with each of its parts, I allowed the thing through a process of contemplation to come together in my mind as a whole work. My proposal

Kierkegaard's concern is always with how to choose, going forward and *in the first place*. Our interpretation of the roles of irony and humor does not force on the reader a sheer leap of faith; imagination's progressive inhabitation of its objects is rather the incremental dawning of further spheres of existence on the subject. In this vein Kierkegaard writes that irony is a preparation for ethical subjectivity in that it 'infinitely accentuates one's own I' but in the form of an incognito.¹²⁸ So to an extent, we can agree with the first line of commentary discussed above. But that is compatible with agreeing with the second that it is not transition through the sharing of reasons by means of argument.

was that the reader should do the same. For him too the whole thing was to confront him like a single point that divides everything into a disjunction. But, for this to happen, *the reader would have to enter into a relation of self-activity with the book*—as I had intended throughout that he should and as I had sought to bring about by abstaining completely from saying anything about the plan of the work within the work itself. In any case, I was in no position to have any more definite view on this matter than other reader of the work, should there be one. The plan of the work as a whole is a task for self-activity, and to impose my own understanding on the reader seemed to me an offensive and impertinent meddling. Every person experiences an either/or in his life. . . . That is the essential thing; sentence length and the number of middle terms are contingent. But the grasp of the plan will differ according to the degree of the individual's development. (SKPJ 170/*Papirer* IV B 59 [1844]).

¹²⁸ SKPJ 188/*Papirer* VI A 38 [1845].

Concluding Remarks

Car enfin qu'est-ce que l'homme dans la nature? Un néant à l'égard de l'infini, un tout à l'égard du néant, un milieu entre rien et tout, infiniment éloigné de comprendre les extrêmes; la fin des choses et leurs principes sont pour lui invinciblement cachés dans un secret impenetrable

Pascal, *Pensées* 72 [Brunschvig]

*There is no complete life. There are only fragments.
We are born to have nothing, to have it pour through our hands*

James Salter, *Light Years*

The strain of thinking that coalesces in Jena romanticism and is extended in new and importantly different ways by Kierkegaard combines radical theories of subjectivity with emphasis on the existential import of theorizing. German idealism, by contrast, advances accounts of self as based in either pure or optimal social rationality, which have comparatively less primary concern for the impact of theoretical discourse on individual experience. The key idealist here is Hegel, who inaugurated internal to his own philosophical system a critique of the Jena romantics that is often still in force today. But Hegel is also on the receiving end of a repurposed conception of irony that has many points of contact with the Jena group in the form of Kierkegaard's responses to 'the system'. To restate the point of contention in a form that takes us back to the conclusion of chapter three, the burning question for Kierkegaard—and one might argue for Schlegel and Novalis as well—is how philosophical understanding *starts*. How do forms of philosophical thinking emerge and how important is it philosophically to experience that emergence as an enduring aspect of that thinking? Strictly speaking, Hegel's system does not have what Cummings calls a 'starting point'; it is more accurate, albeit a bit metaphorical, to say that Hegel's system wheels into action *all at once*, once it is irritated by socio-historical content to be. For Kierkegaard, and for Schlegel and Novalis before him, the brokered truce in Hegel between essentialism and historicism is an expression of philosophical anxiety concerning the

power that contingent sources of meaning have to disconcert stable human orientation—a problem, ironically enough, that Hegel himself identifies in Kant's conception of the supersensible but one to which he holds that he, Hegel, has a better non-‘duplicitous’ solution.¹

We have found that one can sort the perceived shortcomings of Jena romanticism into two groups. The first has to do with questions of the scope of what we have called ‘global regulativism’. This is the view that any claim having to do with the absolute, the ground for subjectivity, is provisional and must remain so. Since the Jena romantics accept the generally Kantian and Fichtean notion that claims about the objective world require constitutive contributions from subjective capacities, and that such contributions as they are present in objective judgments cannot be teased apart from any ‘given’ contributions, this would seem to entail that any judgment whatsoever would be regulative or, put in another register that we have developed in talking about the cognitive status of claims in romanticism, that there would be only interpretation. Whatever one might think about the continuing status of Kantianism as a basis for epistemology generally or, more specifically, for the philosophy of science, the idea that all claims are regulative may be for some difficult to credit. This is all the more the case when we remind ourselves of the particular form the idea of regulation takes in Jena romanticism. Such claims would be, as are all regulative claims, hypotheses. The Kantian idea of regulative reason mandates that such hypotheses cannot be discharged. Kant views these rules as heuristic but also transcendently necessary; they have to do for him with invariant and inviolable internal dictates of pure reason. But the idea of pure reason is at right angles with Schlegel's deepest-seated philosophical scruples. For any imaginary construction, as any model of the world would have to be, must be historical and contingent (the Jena position on the absolute included). Thus, the scope question arises. We have reconstructed a moderate view on this point, one that suggests confining the scope of regulativism to matters of value. We found this justified in that the philosophical concerns of Schlegel (here Novalis is exceptional) are mainly with such matters. This is not to say that the Jena group was not drawn at all to projects of ‘natural philosophy’, but it is not their *métier*. Given the run of science from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, which prescinds from the organicism typical of, say, Schelling's *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), one might think that to be not much of a deficit.²

¹ Cf. Kierkegaard's often-cited remark that ‘it is perfectly true that philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But with this one forgets the other proposition (*Sætning*), that it must be lived forwards’. SKPJ 161/*Papirer* IV A 164 [1843].

² There is a recent, valiant, and interesting attempt to reconsider romantic philosophy of science, Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy*,

All told this first set of difficulties, which has to do with how much an extension of Kantianism romanticism is, is less important than a second. Hegel sees clearly the point we have just made, i.e. that the crux of the Jena view is in the ethical, political, and aesthetic realms. Hegel advances two main criticisms of romanticism or, alternatively, one criticism at two levels of specificity. He claims that irony and allied practices are incoherent forms of dialectic. We found this objection more indicative of limitations in Hegel's formal conception of dialectic than successful as a criticism of Schlegel. But we also saw that the Hegel's main concern is Jena romanticism as an allegedly pernicious social doctrine. The charge has bite. While there is overlap in Hegel's and the romantics' views about the importance of intermediary quasi-public social entities, when one moves firmly into the realm of civil society (i.e. the economy) or, even more, the state as Hegel conceives it as a check on civil society, the Jena view can seem problematic. What is at stake here is the centralization of coercive force in a legitimate source and that calls for a level of predictable coordination of views that would not be guaranteed by the sort of interpretative overlap that undergirds romantic conceptions of intersubjectivity. For latter-day ironists like Rorty, this counsels a bifurcation between private and public spheres, a line that to many may seem overdrawn but one whose rigidity is all but dictated by the difficulty in giving an account of how the spheres interact in terms of their rationality. It is no surprise that romanticism tends towards anarchist social and political theories.³

There is a tradition in Hegel interpretation that takes social and political theory to be the culmination of his thought. This is particularly prominent in the Young Hegelians and Francophone reception following Kojève. But Hegel is clear that the realm of what he calls 'Objective Spirit' is not self-standing; rather, it requires justification in terms of Absolute Spirit.⁴ Here again is a certain overlap with romanticism. As we saw, Hegel advances an extraordinarily comprehensive and complex account of art's and religion's role in such justification, but we also saw that Hegel holds that philosophy, and in particular his own speculative idealism, plays the dominant role in modern society. This was of course a point of departure for the Young Hegelians, who focused initially on the question of the continuing role of religion in society and politics but, by the time of Marx and

1795–1804 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). See also Odo Marquard, *Transzendentaler Idealismus, Romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse* (Cologne: Dinter, 1987). No one can doubt the importance of natural philosophy to Schelling of course. I remain less persuaded that it is an important part of the legacy of Novalis and Schelling.

³ The Russian cases are particularly interesting, involving as they often do romanticized interpretations of Hegel. Kropotkin is an important exception.

⁴ See HW 13: 131–2.

Kierkegaard, had moved on to the more pointed question of whether Hegel's doctrine of Absolute Spirit was not itself crypto-religious and if it was, what to do about that. Hegel's concern to integrate political thought with art and religion is both a response to what he considered to be overreaching on the part of the scientific Enlightenment and a carryover from romanticism. But while there is shared concern over the topic, the romantics reverse the order of precedence. For them it is precisely romantic art that provides a model for the uses of imagination that have progressive impact. Religion—what several romantics came to call a 'new mythology'—was a distillation of this artistic vision. Like Hegel, the romantics—here Schleiermacher is paramount—deployed the concept of *Kunstreligion*; however, they did so on the theory of overlapping imaginative response as a basis for social rationality. Religion, in this 'mythological' sense, is not a fixed institutional structure the purpose of which is to cement self-understanding in place by reinforcing a superior philosophical view on civil society. Rather, religion is supposed to provide a set of imaginative props that can further social activity, which activity *may or may not* converge on shared understanding. And with the introduction of the issue of rational convergence, we arrive at another source of contention between Hegel and the romantics. For Hegel subjectivity is social *ab initio*. After its own fashion, Jena romanticism wishes to agree, but the romantics cannot agree that subjectivity is social if by 'social' one means a structure or process that necessarily leads to convergence and assimilation of fundamental beliefs. We have used the term 'pragmatism' to limn the receptivity of romanticism to the continuing changing and experimental nature of the relation between philosophical thought and the world. This comes out in the non-teleological historicism of the Jena thinkers but a bit more broadly still in their openness to potential theoretical overthrow and their views on the degree to which philosophical theories must incorporate in their basic frameworks circumspection concerning worldly contingency. Again, Hegel is not insensitive to the requirement, but he fails in nerve, allowing the theory to collapse back into completeness. It is not quite right to think of Jena romanticism as a form of empiricism traditionally conceived, since empiricism so conceived typically rejects the idea that stems from Fichte that theoretical knowledge depends on spontaneous and self-regulating practical engagement. Calling Jena romanticism 'pragmatist' *avant la lettre* is more accurate, but the kind of pragmatism it is crucially not informed by advances in modern science, nor by Peircean ideas of abduction or convergence of belief. James' 'radical empiricism' or Dewey's experiential account of experimentation is closer to the mark; however, it is still important not to put too much faith in labels. The point of calling Jena romanticism 'pragmatist' is to bring out just the elasticity of theory in the

face of the demands of its potential objects that distinguishes it from German idealism. This is not to say, again, that Hegel (and others) do not build into their theories some version of this—the idea that Hegel is an arch systematizer whose system runs roughshod *a priori* over all else is a caricature—but all idealists default at some point to the priority of theory over experience. This is what romanticism, as we have interpreted it, seeks to avoid.

When one turns to Kierkegaard's dual but linked reactions to romanticism and Hegel, one in essence is viewing a Right Hegelian critically adapting resources from Schlegel to modify in a very significant fashion Hegel.⁵ The main point of departure is religion, and Kierkegaard forwards two proposals: (1) that Hegel is incorrect to view religion as being in a relation of reciprocal dependency on ethics, and (2) that the basis for this error is a radical misunderstanding about the religion that Hegel thought most progressive—Protestant Christianity. The mistake is that a rigorous understanding of Christian teaching requires one to see religion as inherently socially isolating, driving one deeper and deeper not into a realm of human interdependency but rather into a relation of dependency on what is irreconcilably opposite to the human. There are many ways to model the relationship circumspectly, but the purpose of such modeling is not to more closely approximate God's condition or even the condition of God's first creative act. It is rather to discipline oneself in the unfathomability of this original condition. The kinship with Schlegel could not be more apparent, but there are significant differences. Schlegel adapts Kantian resources when constructing his account of subjectivity—although he modifies them beyond Kantian recognition—in that he assumes subjectivity to be essentially the spontaneous movement of thought, i.e. fundamentally a radicalized form of imaginative synthesis. This is not so for Kierkegaard, for whom the basic condition is the paradox of God as a human being. The basic condition of subjectivity is sin for him, which is precisely *not* a matter of imaginative construction but rather of being created. In a way, then, Kierkegaard is a median point between Schlegel and Hegel when it comes to conceptions of the absolute and how they guide lives attuned to them. For Schlegel, the absolute is strictly beyond reflective capture, yet all thought is reflective to some degree. Being attuned to this combination of

⁵ Scholars do not typically class Kierkegaard so, but seeing him in this way is revealing. Kierkegaard is 'right' on all fronts but one: he is right on religion (it survives philosophical reduction) and right on politics (against suffrage for women, monarchist, etc.) If by 'right' one means a rank-and-file follower of the letter of Hegelian, however, Kierkegaard hardly qualifies. Sometimes scholars speak of Left and Right Young Hegelians, all of whom were glad to offer corrections to strict Hegelian doctrine, as distinct from 'Old' Hegelians, most of whom were Hegel's graduate students. The sorting of Hegelians into left and right branches is Lenin's innovation, but Toews, *Hegelianism* presents an even more nuanced picture.

the ubiquity of reflection and the evasiveness of final meaning involves enacting in the medium given to finite beings cognitive routines that model both the distance and proximity of the absolute. Irony (and other such routines) are thus supposed to produce a kind of balance in life, but not one that eliminates the tension of the relation of the absolute to conditioned subjectivity. Hegel, on the other hand, holds that the absolute can be grasped because 'the absolute' is synonymous with 'all possible fundamental thought', which the philosopher can exhaustively specify by working through the complete series of such thoughts. The appropriate attunement here is attentively following out the necessary series of forms of thought that are set forth in the *Phenomenology* and recollecting them at the end of that process, both by rehearsing the series as it has unfolded in time and by adopting a more abstract (Hegel would say: more concrete) posture with regard conceptual intra- and interconnection in logic. By no means is this a philosophical equivalent to the Land of the Lotus Eaters, but it seems a good deal less stressful than the tragi-comic self-regard anticipated by Schlegel and required by Kierkegaard.

The main barrier to crediting Kierkegaard's views on subjectivity is the role that Christianity plays in those views. This is hard enough on the Christian, as Jonathan Lear reminds us, given that one of Kierkegaard's most pointed aims is to determine whether there are any real Christians among 'practicing' Christians.⁶ But for those unconvinced or otherwise unmoved by Christianity, not to mention those who find it pernicious, there is always a question concerning the extent to which Kierkegaard's account of subjectivity is dependent on accepting Christian doctrine, more specifically its recto of sin to the verso of grace. We have suggested—but it is only a suggestion—that aspects of Kierkegaard's account of the operation of grace in the formation of one's self-conception have secular correlates in ethical regard, especially as involving humor as a confinium between the domains of the ethical and the religious. Here we placed emphasis on a conception of the fundamental character of other-regard that is in many ways the polar opposite of the Fichte–Hegel line. That idealist line holds that one can be a 'subject' in the full sense of the term only to the extent that one stands under a 'summons' or demand from another person for free regard of that person's freedom. This freedom demanded is of the sort that is common among agents (thus the basis for the reciprocal regard) and, to that extent, assimilative of agents. It does not of course *completely* assimilate agents, washing away every bit of what is singular

⁶ *A Case for Irony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); see also 'The Force of Irony', in *The Force of Argument: Essays in Honor of Timothy Smiley* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 144–64; and, by extension, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

about one. But it does make irrelevant for ethical and political purposes those singularities, preferring to allow them a secondary status having to do with the particular way one experiences the personal uptake of what is common to all. Kant's account of this assimilative character is too abstract for either Fichte or Hegel, but that does not alter the main point, that what is self-constitutive and the point around which one's identity is formed is common rationality. At its base subjectivity for Kierkegaard is socially and rationally *impermeable*; the most one can say is that a socially ethical account of rationality is a necessary but non-basic component of humanity. *Qua* an account of the ethical sphere Kierkegaard does hold Schlegel's view wanting—it does not measure up to the demands of an ethical theory in terms of the required universal rationality. But stopping with this thought would not give the full picture. Kierkegaard also sees in the ethical—and in particular the kind of vanity inherent in thinking of ethical universality as fundamental *tout court*—a grave danger. Recall that the phenomenon that most vexes him is religion parading as ethics. In view of this, one might say that aesthetic self-regard, which Kierkegaard also holds is required to be fully human although not basic for subjectivity, is a more honest barometer for falling short of being religious. One can see the aesthete's difficulties with fully realized social being as a kind of advantage in this regard, as it more cleanly points to the sort of social isolation that is required, at least potentially in times of crisis, for authentic subjectivity.⁷ Irony, adapted to Kierkegaard's purposes from romanticism, is a 'constant point of reference', to use Kierkegaard's subtitle from the dissertation, the way that adjacent spheres of existence indirectly and inexactly communicate with one another.⁸

* * *

Irony, when understood existentially and not merely as an article of speech, is a deep, non-focal form of rational critique. It is worthwhile to juxtapose it with analysis. Analysis operates on a given complex, say, a conceptual complex, and breaks that complex down into its constituent parts, aiming to arrive at its elemental constituents. Analysis thereby is able to reveal both the nature of the parts of the complex in question in isolation from one another and the relations

⁷ That is, one need not constantly be acting in contradistinction to the ethical (or the aesthetic) to be religious in the sense of Religiousness B. Rather, one must be ready to do so. There is an analogy to Kant's ethical theory here, but it must be heavily qualified in multiple directions.

⁸ This is also not to say that Kierkegaard would allow that aesthetic despair could lead directly to Religiousness B, i.e. that one could skip formation by the ethical sphere (and Religiousness A) altogether. As we said early in chapter three, Kierkegaard would not allow a leap of that magnitude. The reason is that, according to him, the spontaneous subjective will is not primed for a severe enough submission to the Paradox until it has fully exercised its attempt to 'play God' by willing universal standards of conduct and understanding itself to be essential with regard to such a faculty.

that obtain between those parts. Crucially, it can lay bare assumptions internal to the complex and tell if certain required relations (e.g. of consistency, of coherence, and so on) within the complex are present. If they are not, the complex may fail to satisfy cognitive requirements and, to that extent, be rejected. Analysis, so understood, is both a deep form of critique (elemental components are separated, their relation understood with clarity, in order to assess whether the whole complex is well formed or not) and focal (if certain relations do not obtain, one has specific guidance concerning how one might adjust the complex *ceteris paribus*). But there are cases where all such conditions are met, and yet one might well want to reject the complex in question. Paranoid delusions are often coherent and self-consistent, perhaps even cogent, but they lack the proper relation to the truth. Internally as a whole the complex is well structured, yet it might fail to meet conditions of acceptance external to it. Analysis of the complex will not provide a rational for such a rejection.

Irony operates to unseat basic assumptions at just this 'whole complex' level. It offers up what on the face of things is a seamless, whole conceptual complex—one that is so self-standing and compact that it might be the proper subject for an epigram. In the formulation just discussed in connection with Kierkegaard, irony might even operate by presenting a sentence in the form of tautology—'are there any Christians among Christians?'—in order to make as frontal an assault on the apparent truth of the underlying proposition by suggesting by the banality of the sentence an unease about its simple truth. It is this contrast of surface simplicity and deeper complexity that is one of the main characteristics of irony, or at least of compact ironic utterances. Schlegel's ironic practice is much more diffusing than this, involving ontological and hermeneutic claims about the interpenetration of fragmentary thoughts and the increased ironic power in their intermeshing. But the prominence that both Schlegel and Kierkegaard accord irony in the constitution of finite subjects—for they both take irony to be a basic, indeed the basic imaginative synthetic capacity—speaks to the importance for them of irony's undercutting role at the level of whole conceptual arrays. Kierkegaard's query about Christians—and it is crucially for him an interrogative—is not whether anyone measures up to the demanding ideal of being a Christian. It is rather a question of what the meaning of that ideal is in the first place—what sort of sense it makes at all. This is the 'serious' side of irony, its identificatory side. In raising questions about the very nature of the concepts it deals with (some might say, less charitably, 'deals in'), irony may seem remote from, even disdainful of, those concepts, and in a sense it is remote from them. Irony is a form of reflective distance. But in a sense it is not remote, since the concept under ironic consideration shows aspects of itself that are unavailable to

other modes of reflection. In particular, the sensitivity of the concept to radical extension relative to other ways of thinking about its possible content can be made apparent. Irony is a form of caring about its objects, of cultivating them, which form honors the concept by risking that the concept will fail in the end to withstand the scrutiny. Schlegel holds that any concept that can figure in human self-understanding (save perhaps the merely explanatory, like those of physics, chemistry, and biology) is subject to this sort of scrutiny, and that is certainly a vertiginous thought. Kierkegaard hesitates to go quite so far, holding that controlled irony and humor are crucial, non-elective aids to *specific* radical personal reorientation. But it is worth noting that ultimately humor is not efficient in bringing about the specific reorientation and that the being towards which one is to reorient oneself, which is constitutive of subjectivity at the basic level for Kierkegaard, is no less an inducement to vertigo: God, understood in an entirely non-anthropomorphic way.

Unlike analysis irony is 'non-focal', in the sense that it does not offer replacements for concepts placed under criticism; it does not say what to do or think instead. In point of fact, it is calibrated precisely *not* to do this. It is this lack of a 'positive turn' that perhaps accounts for much of the contemporary resistance to 'strong programs' of irony. Not endorsing a determinate way forward after one has destabilized the status quo might seem to be taking the easy way out. But we have suggested that it is not a facile matter to restrain oneself from simplifying prognostication from on high. There is danger of over-assimilation of 'alternatives' to the very status quo found wanting. Irony does not rule out minimal adjustment of the status quo, but irony crafts the possibility that one might think in wider scope and more exuberantly, freeing the imagination to entertain alternative ways to think and be that are not merely proximate to what was once given.

Irony will never present itself as 'useful' for contemporary philosophy. Rather, and especially in its more unbridled forms, it hopes to present stark contrasts with standardized modes of thinking by the very act of invoking such modes. Schlegel's and Kierkegaard's rival conceptions of ironic bearing, as well as Hegel's struggle to acknowledge in irony a form of critique, are worth keeping in mind as examples of philosophical unsettledness that is embraced and cultivated, not ignored.

Appendix

Consideration of Novalis' and Schlegel's claims that poetry can go beyond systematic philosophy both in reflection on the status of subjectivity relative to its source in the absolute and in charting the experience of living such a conception of subjectivity is incomplete without discussion of Novalis' and Schlegel's literary work, in particular Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and Schlegel's *Lucinde*. What is required is more than a thumbnail sketch of these works, for the ways in which they are intended to extend philosophical reflection are often not explained to the reader in brief formulations. A more extensive treatment is necessary, even if that treatment falls well short of a comprehensive literary interpretation of the works. I have chosen to discuss pertinent aspects of these works in an appendix to the main text of the book, and loosely in the form of an independent essay, in order not to interrupt the main arguments of the first chapter with lengthy literary analysis.

A.

Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1800/02) is an unfinished novel that takes as its main theme the development of its eponymous hero from childhood through early maturity in terms of his growing awareness of his capacities.¹ This can make the novel seem like an early example of the *Bildungsroman*, but *Heinrich* is hardly a typical novel. Novalis takes pains to short-circuit any single genre assignment to the work by mixing several genres together: fantasy, lyric poetry, more or less standard narrative, and dramatic dialogue.² The result, depending on one's perspective, is either a hodge-podge or a wonderful new *Gesamtkunstwerk*. *Heinrich's* central structure embodies the reflexivity we have associated with Novalis and Schlegel's idea of how best to show the absolute. At the heart of the novel is another book, which treats its hero-poet's life in terms of the developing self-awareness of his gifts. This book within a book (fictionally written in the Provençal dialect of medieval Occitan) plays a central role both in the main narrative of *Heinrich* and in our interpretation of it.

Chronologically, *Heinrich* is set in Novalis' beloved Middle Ages, and the narrative of the book is roughly divisible into seven or eight sequential episodes in the life of its main

¹ Novalis finished the first half of the planned novel, the part entitled 'Die Erwartung'. A large fragment of the beginning of the second part, 'Die Erfüllung', as well as a few other portions of the book in draft are also extant. Tieck reported in great detail on Novalis' intentions for the second half, and appended his report to the first edition of the work. It is wise to take the reports with a grain of salt. Schlegel was much more cautious and prohibited Tieck from finishing off the book (although the Jena provenance for such a post-mortem co-authorship, *Godwi*, must have made the idea somewhat attractive).

² As we have seen, the goal of the romantic poet-philosopher is not to write in given genres, but to 'mix and fuse' poetry and prose, creation and criticism, etc., with irony as the synthetic agent. See AFr 116, KFSa 2: 182–3.

protagonist. In the initial section, the reader is shown the home life of the child Heinrich, an idyllic one in which a kind father and caring mother have equal influence on him. This reflects Novalis' commitment to the idea that a well-constituted man must combine masculine *and* feminine virtues, a stock in trade of the romantics but for its day a radical thought. As important as this representation of the family is for Novalis, the part of the novel that is best known by far dominates this early section: Heinrich's dream of the blue flower. Because its impact cannot be assessed by piecemeal citation, I quote the passage in full. We find the child Heinrich already within his remarkable dream when he envisions himself:

climbing over mossy stones, which former floods had loosed. The higher he climbed, the sparser [*lichter*] the forest became. After a while he reached a small meadow, which lay on the slope of the mountain. Beyond the meadow a high cliff rose [*erhob sich eine hohe Klippe*], at the foot of which he caught sight of an opening, which appeared to be the beginning of a passageway cut into the rock. The passage led him comfortably on for a time and then widened into an expanse from which a bright light [*Licht*] shone, already evident to him from afar. As he entered, he became aware of a mighty beam of light [*Strahl*], which rose as a fountain to the very ceiling of the vault and sprayed forth in countless sparks that were gathered in a basin [*Becken*] below. The beam glistened like flaming gold and not the faintest sound was to be heard—a holy stillness enveloped the glorious spectacle.

He approached the basin, which surged and trembled [*wogte und zitterte*] in endless color. The liquid, not hot but cool, covered the walls of the cave where it emitted only a subdued bluish light. He dipped his hand into the basin and moistened his lips. It was as if a spirit breathed through him and he felt inwardly refreshed and strengthened. An irresistible longing to bathe seized him and he undressed and stepped into the basin. It was as if a sunset cloud enveloped him, a heavenly sensation flowed inmost through him and with profound delight countless thoughts strove to mingle within him. New images never seen before arose, interfused and became visible beings around him, and every wave of the lovely element nestled [*schmiegte sich*] to him like a tender bosom [*wie ein zarter Busen*]. The waters appeared to be charming girls in dissolution, momentarily embodied amidst the young boy.

Intoxicated with rapture and yet conscious of every impression, he swam with ease down the luminous stream as it flowed out of the basin and into the cliff-breach. A kind of sweet slumber fell over him in which he dreamt of indescribable things, out of which he was stirred by another illumination [*Erleuchtung*]. He found himself on soft lawn by the edge of the fountain, which shot up in the air and seemed to consume itself there. Dark-blue cliffs with bright veins arose at a distance, the daylight around him was brighter and milder than ordinary daylight, and the sky was dark blue and pure. Yet what forcefully attracted him was a tall, pale-blue flower, which stood beside the spring and touched him with its broad glistening leaves. Around it were countless other flowers of every color and the most exquisite fragrance filled the air. He saw nothing but the blue flower and gazed on it long and with inexpressible tenderness. As the flower began all at once to move and change he would approach it. The leaves then became more glistening and nestled [*schmiegeten sich*] the growing stem. The flower leaned toward him and its petals displayed an expanded blue corolla in which a delicate face hovered [*schwebte*]. His sweet astonishment increased with the strange transformation, when suddenly the voice of his mother woke him and he found himself in his parents' front room, which was already gilded by the morning sun.³

³ NS 1: 196–7.

Close consideration of this passage, i.e. of its prosody, imagery, and conceptual structure allows one to track romantic claims that literary expression has the power to see around the corner, as it were, of more prosaic philosophical writing. One central unifying device of the passage is the various ways in which color is described as suffusing the dream.⁴ Although the dream sequence is famous for the blue flower and for the blue or 'bluish' light that forms the substance of the basin and pool, it is the bright, golden light seen from afar that attracts Heinrich to the breach in the outcropping of rock. This experience of golden color is intensified in the description of the upward rushing of the stream of the fountain, and is repeated as a figure diminuendo at the conclusion of the passage, after Heinrich awakes in the *Stube* 'gilded by the morning sun' (i.e. by dawn). The color of gold is symbolically resonant, exemplifying richness in this world (i.e. gold as mined from rock, gold as currency) and in whatever lies beyond it (i.e. eternal glory, an idea picked up over and over again in the passage with various phrases referring to the 'holy').⁵ And the opulence of the experience is reflected and reinforced in the music of Novalis' various combinations of long vowel assonance and sibilant alliteration. But there is something else quite remarkable about the scene, which is introduced well before the blue flower and which may therefore be missed: its treatment of color as a primary, and not a secondary, quality. Color is all but substantivized, not treated as a modification of an underlying thing. Novalis does deploy standard images of fluidity to describe the contents of the fountain and basin, but very obliquely. Metaphorical constructions construing color as a liquid are also present, but the passage is crucially much more than an extended metaphor of color in terms of things. Novalis does not describe, for instance, golden water that we see, or bluish pools; rather it is literally a fountain *of the color gold* and a pool *of the color pale-blue*. Novalis is describing a world in which colors are things, and moreover, embodied things. That this substantivization is to be taken quite seriously is emphasized in the description of the font as 'self-consuming', an elegant reversal of the usual criterion for substance of being 'self-causing', which is much in keeping with the Jena concentration on the dialectical relationship of generation and corruption. Likewise, one should also read the 'blue veins' of the cliff literally. Of particular note is the way the color imagery of the passage refracts at various angles through Novalis' treatment of the classic four elements: earth, fire, water, and air. For example—and it is an important example for

⁴ Consideration of the effects that Novalis ascribes to the experience of color in light of Goethe's *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810) would be productive, but we cannot go into that here. For suggestive thoughts, see Géza von Molnár, *Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 105f. For an enlightening recent assessment of the importance of Goethe generally in the development of idealism, see Eckart Förster, *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie*.

⁵ Medieval European discussions of light and treasure in the tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius likely form the intellectual background for Novalis' treatment. The *ne plus ultra* in this line is Suger's St. Denis. For discussion, see Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Treasures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946); see also Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture & the Medieval Concept of Order*, 3rd ed., Bollingen Series, vol. XLVIII (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). Panofsky nominates Eriugena as the missing link between Dionysius and Suger; Simson plumps for Hugh of St. Victor.

Novalis—earth is conceived precisely not as dumb, obdurate stone, but rather as creative, both a fund for recreation and a source of riches. This conception of earth acquires more importance later in the book, but even in this early passage the cliff and natural basin are exemplary. Here one sees earth merge with water—the flowing stream of the colors in which the dream-Heinrich is immersed—in an image of rock as a molten, *living* thing (yet not unbearably hot). Building on this affinity, Novalis introduces fire as another way of making color elemental (e.g. the description of the fountain), and air both breathes through Heinrich (i.e. *spiritus*/πνεῦμα) and is the medium in which yet another substantivized secondary quality, i.e. scent, permeates the cavern.

Even this cursory treatment of just one family of central images reveals Novalis' philosophical views at work. Crucially, Novalis does *not* discuss philosophical positions (although that does happen in the novel, in sections that involve more explicitly dialectic) but puts his idea of romanticism into action. Making color substantive in the way he does blurs the division within ordinary experience between surface and deep properties (between secondary and primary qualities); this, in turn, serves to place all appearances on a par. This highlights how absolutely 'other' something as truly deep relative to appearance as the absolute would have to be. The choices of the colors and effects of light as themes also give an appropriately indeterminate sense of the absolute's inexplicable contact with experience by putting the source for the light and color beyond grasp, even leaving it unmentioned.

There are two other aspects to the passage that merit discussion. The first is its religious bearing, its ample and ecstatic use of Christian imagery. Much of Novalis' treatment of color sounds in the register of transubstantiation, of spirit and body being indissolubly one, i.e. absolute. Secularization of Trinitarian doctrine is a staple of German idealism as well, as is obvious in the case of Hegel. But unlike Hegel, who foregrounds the Holy Spirit as the most philosophical component of the Trinity, Novalis places emphasis firmly on the idea (expressed in the amalgam of life/death—body/Spirit) that humans are caught in a paradox of finitude and infinitude, a stress shared with Kierkegaard. The second further aspect of the passage that must be brought to bear in any interpretation is its sexual overtone. No German reader could miss this, and we have tried to bring it forward in the English translation of the passage. The actions of the fountain in surging, quivering, shooting into the air, and consuming itself, are overtly erotic. So too is the description of the flowing of the stream into the cleft of rock, the domed womblike expanse of the cavern, the use of 'Becken' (both 'basin' and 'pelvis'), the fluidity that embodies itself only to touch the nude bather—all signal sexual union and orgasm. Most patent perhaps is the use in close proximity of the verb 'wiegen' and the noun 'Busen', unmistakably echoing the stock German phrase for 'heaving breasts'. Novalis is after much more than mere titillation here; as was the case with the religious imagery, and in keeping with the more metaphysical way of interpreting the passage with which we started, the sex has to do with the theme of minds and bodies coupling and merging. In light of the foregoing, the pale-blue flower may seem a bit of letdown. And indeed, part of our interpretative strategy has been to dislodge exclusive focus upon this famous image at the expense of the overall integrity of the passage when viewed against the background of Novalis' philosophical

thought. That said, the image of the blue flower *is* crucial. First, it introduces into the scene the theme of organic life as emerging out of its inorganic substrate, and thus of the ultimate unity of the two in their utter difference. The passage is transformed into sheer fantasy—taken over the top—by Novalis’ introduction near its end of a face in the calyx of the flower as a central organizing image, which will turn out in a later remembrance of this dream to be the face of Heinrich’s lover Mathilde. This startling image is botanically complex. The calyx is the protective covering in a bud that has yet to flower. It protects not just the petals but also the reproductive parts of the plant (the pistil, stigma, and, housed at the base of the structure for which the stigma is the opening, the ovule). The image, accordingly, contains equal parts Christian religiosity (i.e. the stigma), sexuality (i.e. the stigma as the entry into the flower’s ovule), and a combination of the two (chastity). As the penultimate chapter of the novel plays out, a memory of the bending of the calyx-face toward the dream-Heinrich and its resulting dream-kiss is recalled to Heinrich by the actual kiss of his love, Mathilde. It is through this that Heinrich realizes that the face in the flower is hers and that the dream was something more, an augury of his destiny. It is also through this kiss that Heinrich first becomes aware that the dream-kiss is an episode in the Provençal book-within-book. Indeed, as is often overlooked in scholarship on the novel, the dream of the blue flower contains a dream-within-dream. Dream-Heinrich falls asleep at the edge of the fountain (a standard idyllic device) only to be awakened by ‘another illumination’. We are not told what dream-Heinrich dreamed in the dream-within-dream, but its presence suggests that the vision iterates in reverse, a literary form of the *ordo inversus*.

Let us turn briefly to a few more general structural features of the book in order to develop this other aspect of its philosophical significance. We have already mentioned the book-within-book motif, but a synopsis of the episodic plot brings out even more the overarching reflexivity of the novel. After the set pieces of the parental home and the dream, Heinrich sets forth in life as a promising scholar. In time, he falls in with a group of traveling merchants who praise his poetic gifts, which to this point have taken a back seat to his studies. He next encounters a group of knights returning from the Crusades. The Crusaders are presented as a contrasting example of the adventurer or hero of a quest, and they attempt to enlist Heinrich on a return to the Holy Land. Important for the contrast, and especially for making the contrast apparent to Heinrich, is Zumila, an ‘oriental girl’ who accompanies the knights and offers ‘exotic’ enticements. He declines these and, in so doing, attains a more precise understanding of the nature and scope of his own strivings.

The first of three crucial further encounters in the book occurs in its fifth chapter, where Heinrich meets a miner who initiates him in the mysteries of earth. This section of the novel introduces or expands upon several themes, but most important for present purposes is that of Heinrich’s deepening sense of what one might call the ‘sublimity of history’. This is afforded him not only by the descent into the netherworld of the mine with its strange riches and unfathomable roots, but also by the teachings of a hermit (who we later find out is the author of the book-within-the-book, the Graf von Hohenzollern). Heinrich develops here, with the hermit’s help, a sense of the importance of memory essential to his poetic vocation. The conception of memory at work here is not that of simple re-experiencing of the past in the present; it is a more reflexive experience of the

resonance of the past in the present. Specifically, it involves a sense of being continually rooted in the past as a source for personal identity. The poet must 'go down' and tunnel into memory and excavate poetic riches from its veins. One may always dig deeper; there is no final place where all becomes immediate and clear. And with greater depth comes greater peril, e.g. the danger of losing one's compass or not being able to surface at all. It is this understanding of memory and history that reveals to Heinrich the nature of intuition, its limits, and its dangers. Novalis presents intuition here not as passive; it is, rather, an achievement and one that calls for one part constant renewal and one part severe circumspection. For the mirror of reflection always shapes intuition, even self-intuition. This registers Novalis' holism: any intuited truth is only such against a further background—Jacobi's main point concerning systematicity.

The second meeting is with the master poet Klingsohr, whom commentators often equate with Goethe.⁶ Klingsohr is important to Heinrich as a teacher of poetic craft, but it is the introduction of Klingsohr's daughter into the narrative that yields the third, and even more significant, encounter. Mathilde brings Heinrich to maturation as a poet through her love and their union, which both was prefigured in the dream of the blue flower and is the culmination of the dream's impact on Heinrich, since it is through the first kiss with Mathilde that he is brought to realize the identity of the face in the dream (and in the hermit's book). Mathilde's death further pushes Heinrich to the brink of sensing the unity of the natural and supernatural, although, in good Jena fashion, the gap between them is never closed.

The novel, as we said, was left unfinished. Perhaps this is but a sign that Novalis only finished the first of two planned parts of the book and that, had the book been completed as Novalis had planned (however he so planned), the hermit's book would have found its conclusion as well. Yet the hermit says that he has come by the book incomplete (in Jerusalem) where he found it among the papers of a dead 'friend'. This may indicate incompleteness as a persistent condition of the book, and of the life it charts. This, again, would be in keeping with the idea of infinite striving so central to Novalis' philosophical writings.

B.

Schlegel's *Lucinde* (1799) was from the beginning a controversial work, a controversy extended not merely to its sometime explicit sexual content and politics (the priggish

⁶ The figure of Klingsor has a varied history. The two most famous works in which he makes an appearance are *Heinrich* and Wagner's *Parsifal*. The literary root of the character is Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic *Parzival*, where he is an ambiguous creation, part necromancer and part *Meistersinger*. Novalis sanitizes the character, downplaying the more overtly Faustian elements (if the character were meant as a thinly veiled Goethe, one might have expected the reverse) and playing up the nurturing master poet. E. T. A. Hoffmann reintroduces complexity to the figure ('Der Kampf der Sänger' (1819)), but by the time Wagner inherits him, Klingsor is reduced in the other direction, entirely given to miserly black magic. Novalis also borrows the idea of the song-contest at Wartburg from Wolfram (who composed parts of his poem there), as did Wagner (for *Tannhäuser*). This is pertinent for Novalis because Heinrich is a *Minnesinger*, the German equivalent to the *langue d'oc* troubadour, who makes an oblique appearance as the author of the book-within-book.

Hegel seemed particularly offended) but to the even deeper issue of whether it should be considered a 'work' at all. Its publication inaugurated a period of great difficulty as well as creativity for Schlegel. Because of it he was almost failed in the *rigorosum* for his dissertation, and its reception colored his ill-fated *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy*, which we have already discussed. If one locates the salad days of early German romanticism in Jena, then one might even say that those days ended in the aftermath of the book: Schlegel left Jena for good after the lectures, joining his brother August in Berlin in 1801. In the meantime, Novalis had died.⁷

As a novel *Lucinde* is not very successful, judged even by the loose standards of romanticism. It can seem willfully disjointed, overly episodic, and clogged by a riot of juxtaposed styles, none of which is mastered. Of course it is unlikely that Schlegel cared to compose a 'successful novel' or to please critics, but one should not puff up the artistic merits of the book in order to vouch for its philosophical ones; instead, we shall attempt to reconstruct the book without evaluating its overall aesthetic merit, as an extension of Schlegel's views on irony and the role of art in extending past explicitly philosophical prose.

Even more than Novalis, Schlegel was fond of using the standard features of a genre to undermine its fixity and of deploying complex architectonic devices within a work in order to achieve this result. *Lucinde* has an overarching tripartite organization: (1) The first six chapters, which cycle through various short forms of fiction writing, epistle, fantasy, character sketch, allegory, and idyll. The action of these chapters takes place in the novel's present. (2) A single centerpiece chapter in traditional narrative form called 'Apprenticeship for Mankind' follows. This chapter consists of a past history, which leads up to the present of the first six chapters. This history is not, however, told in flashback. It is rather presented as a separate part of the book, which refers the past to the present without a narrative bridge between the two. (3) The last six chapters present the future action of the novel in the form of a vision. This 6-1-6 symmetrical structure of the book recalls schemata in Renaissance and Baroque allegorical writing, e.g. in Spencer, Donne, and Herbert in the English tradition, and it is this tendency to allegory that shows the novel to best effect.

Many commentators have seen *Lucinde* as a *roman à clef*, heavy on the *clef*, with its main characters, the lovers Julius and Lucinde, as stand-ins for Schlegel and his wife-to-be

⁷ Lukács stresses Novalis' pointed divergence from and appropriation of the *Bildungsroman* form of *Wilhelm Meister* in *Heinrich*. (See 'On the Romantic Philosophy of Love: Novalis', in *Soul and Form*, trans. A. Bostock, ed. J. Sanders and K. Terezakis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 59–72 [original=1910]). If *Heinrich* is the 'anti-Meister', as Raymond Geuss, following Lukács, puts it (see *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 38), perhaps *Lucinde* might be called the anti-*Woldemar*. The first volume of Jacobi's *Woldemar* was published in 1779, with both volumes published in 1796 as a second edition. This is the edition that Schlegel read and reviewed. The theme of *Woldemar* is the relation of love to moral character. Jacobi presents the love of the two main characters, Henriette and Woldemar, as 'true' insofar as it is 'Platonic', i.e. does not involve sex. Schlegel's observation that the novel pivots on the 'unmarriagability' of Henriette must be understood in this light. *Woldemar*'s wife Allwina is, by contrast, merely a dumping ground for his physical passions. In this way, as Schlegel shrewdly notes, the two women are sacrificed on the altar of Woldemar's supposed virtue, but the sacrifice means that Woldemar cannot become the moral hero Jacobi desires.

Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit. As far as its action goes, however, *Lucinde* is a kind of *ars amatoria* refracted through a dialectical lens. The most charitable way to view the book as art is as an attempt to strike a balance between 'having a system (or theory) and not having one', in Schlegel's famous formulation. Schlegel conceives of the love of the main characters for one another as dialectical, where individual freedom and acknowledgement of another as free are intrinsically and reciprocally related and intended to be an erotic parody of Fichte's theory of positing.⁸ The six sections that open the novel with the lovers in their present state can be understood as a dialectical give and take, each step of which builds out of the last and deepens both the emotional and physical fusing of the protagonists. On the way, the lovers touch upon many thematic areas not directly concerned with their love, e.g. Schlegel's progressive views on the equality of the sexes, the plasticity of masculine and feminine roles, and so on. But the main narrative movement of the book is the consummation of the love of Julius and Lucinde, which climaxes in the last of the six opening sections, 'Fidelity and Playfulness'. This section of the book explicitly likens the doctrine of the posits to sex, describing the sexual intercourse of the couple in those terms, invoking the pure naturalness of their union in terms of civil marriage or cohabitation (a favorite Jena pastime), and ends with Lucinde's pregnancy.⁹ Of course, every philosophically aware, dialectical portrayal of love must trace itself back to the *Symposium*, and Schlegel is no exception. But, whereas Diotima's myth within the dialogue traces a dialectical ascent of reason on the heels of love that incrementally transcends physicality, Schlegel's version has very little to do with reason and everything to do with physical love. As did Novalis, Schlegel believes that the idea that love is made perfect by minimizing its bodily expression is based on extremely dubious Platonic/Cartesian views concerning the relation of the soul to the body. One of the things that Schlegel finds most laudable in Leibniz, by contrast, is his hylomorphism.

Let us postpone discussion of the center section of the book and skip to its last six chapters, where the demands of family and the imminent death of Lucinde have a maturing effect on the couple's love. This registers primarily through Julius, who has come to see his prior attempts to elevate their love as failures, or at least as radically

⁸ KFSa 5: 61. Ernst Behler mentions Bion as another possible model. See *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1993), p. 295. Lampooning Fichte was a favorite romantic pastime. See, e.g. Jean Paul's *Clavis fichtiana* (1799).

⁹ The sexual frankness of the novel is key to the earlier section 'Idylle über die Müßiggang' (KFSa 5: 25ff.). The basic opposition in the highly constructed theatrical scene is between two versions of creativity. In one of them, typified by Prometheus, who is positioned, chained, to the right of the stage, one creates on one's own (and under the lash). His creations are tossed out, one upon the other, and are 'immediately indistinguishable'. The audience comprises 'youthful figures', some cupids, some 'satyr-like', and some resembling 'devils in Christian paintings'. And one of them, a 'little devil', speaks up and pardons this display because, after all, one cannot expect to create humans all alone. The second form of creativity is personified in Herakles, who can 'keep fifty maidens busy each night for the good of humanity, and heroic girls at that' (KFSa 5: 29). In the given scene, Herakles is a bit less embroiled than that, only entertaining Hebe on his lap (for the moment at least) (cf. *Metamorph.* 9.401–2; *Od.* 11.603). His labors are 'sublime leisure' and 'more sensible', his union with women a form of social creation. For a typical description of leisure time from the Greek sources that inform Schlegel's setting of this scene, see Aristophanes, *Peace* 341: 'πλεῖν μένειν βινεῖν καθεύδειν' ('sailing, hanging out, fucking, and sleeping').

incomplete. As with the transfiguration of Heinrich's love through Mathilde's death in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Julius only achieves a measure of the absolute through Lucinde's death. One might be tempted at this point to reassert a closer tie to *Symposium*, and thus to the concomitant Platonic notions of supernatural intuition and overcoming of the physical. After all, even if approach to the absolute is always a matter of 'approximation' in the Jena sense of the term, Julius is only spurred to see that this is the case and to adopt the corresponding life vocation by the transforming death of his lover. More negatively, one might want to side with Goethe, who saw in the books of the Jena Circle a 'sick', death-addled eroticism.¹⁰ Or, *pace* Goethe and presumably also Schlegel, one might argue that *Lucinde* is in fact rather *Meister*-like, or at least more so than is *Heinrich*. The assumption of familial responsibilities that dominates the final chapters of the book may appear to be an accommodation of individuality to society, but seeing in this a retreat to traditional conceptions of domesticity is shortsighted. This is one mark of what sort of 'society' one is talking about here—i.e. one that has more to do with the Haight in the Summer of Love than with late eighteenth-century German burghers. The family, after all, is a matter of civil religion, the marriage one 'in nature' only. It is preferable, therefore, to steer a more dialectical course. There is no denying that Jena romanticism had its fascination with the transfigurative power of death, a theme that is prevalent in important later work indebted to various degrees to German romantic philosophy—e.g. the novels of Mann and Broch, the music of Richard Strauss, Mahler, Zemlinsky, and the early Schönberg. But what is transfiguring for the Jena group, and for Schlegel in particular, is not the discovery or revelation of a new kind of intuitive grasp of what is beyond the world of sense. It is rather that death throws finitude into high contrast with something other and unknowable. Death sets a limit on the human that one must, nonetheless, take as constitutive of being human and towards which one must orient one's agency. Heidegger was the first perhaps, and certainly the most famous, to credit romanticism with this insight and to stress its importance for human finitude. But one need not accept either Heidegger's own version of the doctrine or his idiosyncratic philosophical historiography to allow the point.

Finally, let us turn to the center section of the book. This chapter is formally the most conventional part of the book; it is structured as a mini-*Bildungsroman*, as its title ('Apprenticeship of Man') indicates. It relates how Julius came to be the person who has fallen in love with Lucinde, charting the formation of his character through his exposure to various kinds of love. Schlegel conceives of the lover as a kind of maker on a par with Novalis' hero-poet. It is important to note that Julius' *Bildung* even prior to meeting Lucinde is by no means a discovery of how to accommodate individuality within a given society. It is expressly utopian, given over to a personal preparation for inaugurating a new social order around a radicalized conception of love. But even more important in terms of the reflexivity and irony of the work is the structural importance of this section relative to the others. This chapter may be positioned in the middle of the book, and may seem in virtue of its more novelistic form more thematically substantial than its more

¹⁰ J. P. Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, 3rd ed., ed. F. Bergemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Insel, 1987), p. 310 [2.IV.1829].

rhapsodic counterparts, but in truth this central chapter is not the center of the book. In fact, the novel does not have a center, and its middle chapter has that status only ironically. The key chapters of the book are the other twelve, extending from the present moment of the courtship and consummation of love into that love's future. What should be the 'decorative' framing elements of the book are more structurally integral than what they frame.

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